



LADY BARBARITY.



LADY BARBARITY.

A Romantic Comedy.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"WILLOW, THE KING," "MISTRESS DOROTHY MARVIN,"
ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

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DEPLORES THE SCARCITY OF MEN.

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TO deny that I am an absurdly handsome being would be an affectation. Besides, if I did deny it, my face and shape are always present to reprove me. Some women I know—we call each other friends—who happen to possess an eyebrow, an elbow, an impertinence, a simper, or any other thing that is observable, I have seen to cast their eyes down at a compliment, and try to look so modest too, that one could tell quite easily that this missish diffidence was a piece of art since it sat so consciously upon 'em, it could not possibly be nature. But furnished as I am with a whole artillery of charms, sure they need no adventitious blushes for their advertisement; indeed, they are so greatly and variously sung that it is quite a common thing for the poets to make an ode or sonnet of 'em every night, and a ballad every morning. The late poor little Mr. Pope was so occupied at times in comparing my eyes to Jupiter, or the evening star, that I was fain to correct him for 't, on the pretext that the heavenly bodies might not like it, they being such exalted things,

whilst my Lady Barbarity was but a humble creature in a petticoat. Therefore if you would know the graces of my person I must refer you to the poets of the age; but if you would seek the graces of my mind, in this book you shall discover them, for I could not make it wittier if I tried. I have heard the young beaux speak of certain women of their acquaintancy as being as justly celebrated for their wit as for their beauty, but have yet to hear the old ones say this, since they know that wit and beauty is as rare a combination as is loveliness and modesty. This book will tell you, then, that my wit is in proportion to my modesty.

I returned from town with a hundred triumphs, but my heart intact. The whirl of fashion had palled upon me for a season. I was weary of the fume I had created in St. James's and the Mall, and I retired to my northern home in the late January of '46. Sweet High Cleebby, cradle of my joyous girlhood, home of romance and these strange events I now relate, let me mention you with reverence and love! Yet our ancestral seat is a cold and sombre place enough, wrapped in ivy and gray ghostliness. The manor is folded in on every side by a shivering gloom of woods, and in winter you can hear them cry in company with those uneasy souls that make our casements rattle. 'Tis dreary as November with its weed-grown moat; its cawing rooks; its quaint gables of Elizabeth; and its sixteenth-century countenance, crumbling and grim. Besides, it occupies a most solitary spot

on the bare bosom of the moors, many a mile from human habitation, a forsaken house indeed where in the winter time rude blasts and the wind-beaten birds are its customary visitors. But the brisk north gales that fling the leaves about it, and scream among the chimneys late at night, had no sooner whipped my cheeks than my blood suddenly woke up and I began to rejoice in my return. The morning after my arrival, when I carried crumbs to the lawn in the hope of an early robin, a frost-breath stung my lips, and at the first bite of it, sure methinks I am tasting life at last. Ten months had I been regaled in town with the cream of everything that is; but it seemed that I must resort to my dear despised old Cleeby for those keen airs that keep the pulses vigorous. London is fine comedy, but in ten months the incomparable Mr. Congreve loses his savour, even for a sinner. Ombre was indeed a lively game; the play adorable. Vauxhall entertaining; wholesale conquest most appetising to feed one's vanity upon; while to be the toast of the year was what not even the psalm-book of my dearest Prue would venture to disdain. To be courted, flattered, and applauded by every waist-coat west of Temple Bar, beginning with the K—g's was to become a mark for envy, and yet to stand superior to it in oneself. But now I was tired of playing "Lady Barbarity" to coats and wigs, and silver-buckled shoes. This is the name the beaux had dubbed me, "Because," said they, "you are so cruel."

It is true that I wore a claw. And if I occasionally used it, well, my endurance was abominably tried, and I will confess that mine is not the most patient temper in the world. The truth is that I was very bitter, having sought ten months in London for a Man, when the pink of England was assembled there, and had had to come away without having found so rare a creature. I had encountered princes, but the powder in their wigs, and buckles of their shoes, were the most imposing parts of their individuality. I had looked on lesser gentlemen, but the correct manner in which they made a leg was the only test you might put upon their characters. I congratulate myself, however, that I made some little havoc with these suits of clothes. Therefore, Barbara became Barbarity, and I sustained this parody as fully as I could. They said I was born without a heart. Having gaily tried to prove to them how sound this theory was, I purchased the choicest string of pearls, and the most delicate box of bonbons money could obtain, and returned to dear High Cleebby, January 22nd, 1746, with my aunt, the dowager, in a yellow-coloured chaise.

The following morning I went to pay my devoir to my lord, who took his chocolate at eleven o'clock in his private chamber. Now I have always said that the Earl, my papa, was the very pattern of his age. He was polished to that degree that he seemed a mirror to reflect the graces of his person and his mind. Lord knows! in all his life 'twas little enough he said, and perhaps still less he did. There is not a deed of his that is important; nor hath he left a solitary phrase or sentiment in which his memory

may be embalmed. 'Twas ill-bred, he used to say, for a man to endeavour to outshine his fellows, and to step out of the throng that is his equal in manners and in birth. And indeed he did not try; but, in spite of that, I am sure he was one of the most considerable persons of his time by virtue of the very things he did not do, and the speeches that he did not utter. It was his privilege, or his art perhaps, to win the reputation of a high intelligence, not because he had one, but because it was a point with him to keenly appreciate its exercise in those who were so liberally furnished. I found him this morning seated at the fire, sipping his chocolate from a low table at his side, and one foot was tucked up on a stool, and bandaged for the gout as usual. On my entrance though, and despite his complicated posture, he rose at once, and bowing as deeply as though I were the Queen, implored me to confer the honour of my person on his chair, and limped across the rug to procure another for himself. When we were seated and the Earl fixed his glasses on, for he was very near-sighted at this time, he quizzed me for at least a quarter of a minute, ere he said:

"Why, Bab, I think you are getting very handsome."

I admitted that I was.

"And do you know that I have heard such a tale of you from town, my pretty lady? You have turned the heads of all the men, I understand."

"Men!" said I, "suits of clothes, papa, and periwigs!"

"Well, well," says he in his tender tone, and

bowing, "let us deal gently with their lapses. 'Tis a sufficient punishment for any man, I'm sure, to be stricken with your poor opinion. But listen, child, for I have something serious to say."

Listen I did, you can be certain, for though I had known my papa, the Earl, for a considerable time, 'twas the first occasion that I had heard him mention serious matters. And as I pondered on the nature of the surprise he had in store, my eyes fell upon an open book, beside his tray of chocolate. It was a Bible. This caused me to look the more keenly at the Earl, and I saw that in ten months ten years had been laid upon his countenance. Even his powder could not hide its seams and wrinkles now. Crows' feet had gathered underneath his eyes, and his padded shoulders were taken with a droop that left his stately coat in creases.

"If I exercise great care," says he with a bland deliberation, "old Paradise assures me that I yet have time to set my temporal affairs in order. And you, my dearest Bab, being chief part of 'em, I thought it well to mention this immediately to you. As for my spiritual affairs, old Paradise is positive that my soul is of so peculiar a colour that he recommends it to be scrubbed without delay. Thus I am taking the proper steps, you see."

He laid his hand upon the Bible.

"'Tis no secret, my dearest Bab," he said, "that Robert John, fifth Earl, your papa, never was an anchorite. He hath ta'en his fill of pleasure. He hath played his hazard, and with a zest both

late and early; but now the candles sink, you see, and I believe they've called the carriage." Again he laid his hand upon the Bible.

'Twas a very solemn moment, and his lordship's words had plunged me in the deepest grief, but when he laid his hand upon that Testament a second time, it was as much as I could do to wear a decent gravity. For he was a very old barbarian.

"You see, child," he continued, "that many years ago I took a professional opinion on this point. The Reverend Joseph Tooley, chaplain to the late lord, your grandpapa (I never felt the need for one myself), was always confident that there was hope for a sinner who repented. He used to say that he considered this saving clause a very capital idea on the part of the Almighty, as it permitted a certain degree of license in our generous youth. In fact, I can safely say that in my case it has been a decided boon, for my blood appears to be of a quality that will not cool as readily as another's; indeed, it hath retained its youthful ardours to quite a middle age. Highly inconvenient for Robert John, fifth Earl, I can assure you, child, but for this most admirable foresight on the part of heaven." The faint smile that went curling round the condemned man's mouth was delicious to perceive. "For my idea has ever been to run my course and then repent. Well, I have now run my course, therefore let us see about repentance. I am about to moderate my port, and resign the pleasures of the table. My best stories I shall refrain from telling, and confine

myself to those that would regale a bishop's lady. But I want you, my charming Bab, to be very affectionate and kind towards your poor old papa; be filial, my love—extremely filial, for I will dispense—I've sworn to do it—with the lavish favours your angelic sex have always been so eager to bestow upon me. Yes, for my soul's sake I must forbid 'em. But lord, what a fortitude I shall require!" This ancient heathen lifted up his eyes and sighed most killingly. "I am reading two chapters of the Bible daily, and I have also engaged a private chaplain, who starts his duties here on Monday week. But I think I'd better tell your ladyship"—with a wicked twinkle—"that he is fifty if he's a day, and with no personal graces to recommend him. I was very careful on those points. For a young and comely parson where there's daughters means invariably a *mésalliance*, and I prefer to risk permanent derangement in my soul than a *mésalliance* in my family."

"You appear, my lord," says I, flashing at him, "to entertain a singularly high opinion of my pride, to say nothing of my sense."

"Tut, my dear person, tut!" says his lordship, wagging a yellow finger at me. "I've made a lifetime's study of you dear creatures, and I know. You can no more resist an unctuous and insidious boy in bands and cassock than your tender old papa can resist a pair of eyes. Oh, I've seen it, child, seen it in a dozen cases—dam fine women too! And their deterioration has been tragical. Faith, a parson where there's women is a most demoralising thing."

"'Pon my soul, my lord," says I, in my courtliest manner, and adroitly misreading the opinion he expressed, "your own case is quite sufficient to destroy that theory, for you, my lord, are not the least ecclesiastical."

"Faith, that's true," says he, and the old dog positively blushed with pleasure; "but had it been necessary for me to earn a livelihood I should certainly have gone into the Church. And while we are on matters theological I might say that I do believe that these strict practices will cheat Monsieur le Diable of my soul, as was my hope from the beginning."

At this my lord could say no more. He burst into such a peal of laughter at his lifelong agility in this affair that the tears stepped from his eyes and turned the powder on his cheeks to paste.

Now I ever had allowed that the Earl, my papa, was the greatest man of my acquaintance. But it was not until this hour that I gauged the whole force and tenacity of his character. That a man should accept the sentence of his death so calmly, and thereupon prepare so properly to utilise his few remaining days in correcting the errors of his life, showed the depth of wisdom that was in his spirit. For he whose worldly business had been diplomacy now placed its particular genius at the service of his soul, that he might strike a bargain, as it were, between Heaven and the Prince of Darkness as to its eternal dwelling place.

"Howbeit this is simply of myself," says he, when recovered of his mirth, "and it is of you,

child, that I desire to speak. Before I go I must see you reasonably wed; beauty and high blood should be broken in and harnessed early, else it is prone to flick its heels and run away. Now, Bab, you have all the kingdom at your feet, they tell me. 'Tis a propitious hour; seize it therefore, and make yourself a duchess with a hundred thousand pound. And farther, you have ever been my constant care, my pretty Bab, and I shall not be content unless I leave you at your ease."

This consideration touched me.

"My lord," says I, "I thank you for these tender thoughts. I fear I must die a spinster, though. For I will not wed a clothes-pole, I will not wed a snuff-box. A Man is as scarce, I vow, as the Philosopher's Stone. So you must picture me, papa, an old maid of vinegar aspect, whose life is compounded of the nursing of cats, and the brewing of caudles. Conceive your brilliant Bab, the handsomest wretch in the realm, who hath all the kingdom kissing her satin shoe, reduced to this in her later years! For I'll warrant me there is not a Man in London."

"Why, what is this?" cries out my lord, his eyebrows rising in surprise. "Is there not the Duke of G——, with his town and country houses? Is he not a Privy Councillor? Hath he not the Garter? Hath he not a rent-roll, and would he not make a duchess of you any day you please?"

"My lord," I answered, sadly, "I am unhappily cursed with a keen nose for a fool."

He looked at me and smiled.

"He is a duke, my dear. But madam is a woman,

therefore let me not attempt to understand her. But there is the Earl of H——, and the Hon. A——, and Mr. W——; indeed, every bachelor of station, lands, and pedigree in town."

"Of which I am bitterly aware," I sighed. "But I require a Man, my lord, not a name and a suit of clothes."

The delightful old barbarian did not apprehend my meaning, I am sure, but the secret of his reputation lay in the fact that he never let the world know that there was a subject in earth or heaven that he did not understand. When a topic travelled beyond the dominion of his mind, he preserved a melancholy silence, and contrived to appear as though the thing was too trivial to occupy his thoughts. But he changed the conversation at the earliest opportunity. The word "love" was to him the most mysterious monosyllable in the world. Wherefore he proceeded to speak about my bills, and said, in his charming way, that he did not mind how much they did amount to if I exhibited a mastery in the art of spending with grace and elegance.

"Now I see there is a yellow chaise," said he, "and a yellow chaise I consider a trifle bourgeois, although my taste is perhaps a thought severe. A purple chaise, or vermilion even, hath a certain reticence and dignity, but yellow is enough to startle all the town."

"True, papa," says I with animation, "and I chose it for that purpose. I adore display; I must be looked at twice; I must perish, I suppose, if the fops did not quiz me in the most monstrous

manner every time I took the Mall. When I die, let it be done to slow music, and I mean to have a funeral at the Abbey if I can. Why, do you know, sir, that the first country town I entered in this wondrous chaise, a tale was got about that the Empress of All the Russias had arrived? 'Twas a moment in my life I can assure you when I danced lightly from that vehicle, and threw smiles to the mob that kept the entrance to the inn. Pomp and circumstance are the blood of me. Dress me in ermine that I may become a show, and provoke huzzahs in every city! And if I must have a man, my lord, let him be a person of character and ideas to cheer me when I'm weary." I ended in a peal of mirth.

"Hum! character and ideas." My lord scratched his chin with a face of comical perplexity. "Would not position and a reasonable pin-money be still more apposite to your case, my dearest person? And anyway," says he, "may I be in my grave ere my daughter Bab marries anyway beneath her. Character and ideas!"

"Amen, to that, my lord!" cries I, with a deal of fervour.

Thereupon I left the Earl to his light refection and his piety. My heart was heavy with the knowledge of his approaching end; but there was still a period in which I might enjoy the inimitable charm of his society. Passing from his chamber, I encountered my aunt upon the stairs. The briskness of her step, and the animation of her face, alike surprised me, as the dowager usually

required nothing short of a cow, a mouse, or a suspicion of unorthodoxy to arouse her.

"Do not delay me, Barbara," she said, brushing past me. "I must see the Earl immediately."

I did not venture to impede her with my curiosity, for my aunt is a dreadful engine when once she is set in motion.

Coming to the foot of the stairs, however, I chanced to stray into the reception parlour to find a comfit box I had mislaid.

"My dear Lady Barbara!" a great voice hailed me, as soon as my face had appeared within the door.

Raising my eyes I saw that I was in the presence of a town acquaintance, Captain Grantley. A look assured me that he was here, not in the social capacity of a friend, but in pursuance of his military duties, inasmuch that he wore the red coat of his regiment, and was furnished with a full accoutrement. Greetings exchanged, he said: "Lady Barbara, I am here to interview the Earl on a matter of some gravity. Nothing less, in fact, than that the Marshal at Newcastle is transmitting one of the prisoners lately ta'en, and a very dangerous and important rebel, to Newgate, and as the straightest way is across your moors, I am come to gain the Earl's permission to billet eight men and horses on him for this evening."

"I have no doubt he will grant it readily," says I, "for are we not aware, my dear Captain, that my papa, the Earl, is the most hopeless Hanoverian in the world?"

"Yet permit me to say, madam," says the

Captain, "that a lady of your sense and penetration I should judge to be quite as hopelessly correct as is her father."

'Twas a soldier's way of turning compliments, you will observe, and of so coarse and ill-contrived a nature that I could not resist a reprimand.

"'Tis the most palpable mistake, sir," I replied ; "for utterly as Captain Grantley and my father are in the right, I, sir, am as utterly in error. For Captain, I would have you know that I am a very rebel, and have shed many a tear for Charlie."

I smartly beat the carpet with my boot, and gave my head its most indignant altitude. This exhibition of sentiment was but the fruit of my natural contrariety however, as I certainly never had shed a tear for Charlie, and was not likely to. Indeed, I had not a care for politics whatever, and for my life could not have said whether Sir Robert Walpole was a Tory or a Whig. But it amused me mightily to see the deep dismay that overtook the Captain, while he tried to gauge the magnitude of the error of which I had attainted him so falsely. And observing how tenderly my rebuke was felt, I was led to recall some town matters in connection with this gentleman. And considering all things appertaining to the Captain's case, it was not remarkable that I should arrive at the conclusion that though it might be true enough that he was ostensibly arranging for the billets of men and horses for the night, he had also made this business the occasion of a visit to Barbara Gossiter, to whom he had been upon his knees in a London drawing-room.

CHAPTER II.

THE REBEL APPEARS.

WE continued to talk with aimless propriety, until the Captain fetched suddenly so huge a sigh out of the recesses of his waistcoat, that it called for an heroic repression of myself to wear a proper gravity of countenance.

"Sir, you are not unwell, I hope," says I, with perturbation.

He saw at once the chance provided for him, and laying his hand profoundly on his heart, was on the point, I do not doubt, of making one more declaration of his undying passion, when the entrance of my aunt curtailed the scene abruptly, and robbed me of the entertainment I had planned.

My aunt conducted the Captain to the Earl, and an hour later that officer went forth to his commander with the permission of my father to lodge the soldiers at Cleebby for a night. It was in the evening at seven o'clock that the prisoner was brought. I did not witness his arrival, as I happened to be dressing at that time, yet none the less I felt an interest in it, for, to say the least, a real live rebel savours of adventures, and those are what the tame life of woman seldom can provide. The Captain having installed his men in the servants' part, was good

enough to come and sup with us, and was able in a measure to enliven the tedium of that meal. The gentlemen talked politics, of course, and I was able to gather from their words that the Pretender Charles was already in a full retreat, and that his army was like to be presently scattered on the earth.

"He'll be flying for his precious life, sir, over hill and moor with our redcoats on his heels," the Captain says, with an enthusiasm that made his face sparkle in the candle light. And I thought this ardour so well adorned him, that he appeared to a prettier advantage as a soldier than as a man of fashion.

Somehow I could not dismiss a certain interest that their military conversation had aroused. Besides, the present circumstances had a novelty, as to-night we were actually involved in the stress of war.

"A rebel must be a very dangerous person, I should fear," I said; "even the sound of rebel hath a spice of daring and the devil in it."

"Highly dangerous," says the Captain.

"Captain, do you know," I said, seized with a desire, "that as I have never seen a rebel I should dearly like to have a peep at one of these desperate creatures. 'Twould be an experience, you know; besides, when a fresh species of wild animal is caught, all the town is attracted to its cage."

"Madam, I would not deny you anything," the Captain bowed, "but you have only to look into the mirror to behold a rebel of the deepest dye."

"But not a dangerous one," I smiled.

"Ah, dear lady," says the Captain, with one hand

straying to his heart, "'tis only for us men to say how dangerous you are."

"Grantley," says the Earl, my papa—and I wish this generation could have seen how elegant he was, even in his age—"if every rebel was as dangerous a one as madam is, there would be a change of dynasty mightv soon."

Afterwards we had piquet together, but wearying of the game, I reminded the Captain of my wish. Without more ado he put me in a hood and cloak, the night being dark, and keen and threatening to snow, and took me to the prisoner on his arm. We bore a lantern with us, otherwise nothing had been visible, for the moon had not appeared yet. The poor rebel we found reposing on straw in one of the stables, but with even less of comfort than is allowed to horses. One of the troopers had mounted guard outside the door, his bayonet fixed, and himself leaning on the panel. He saluted us, and looked as cordial as his rank allowed; but his strict figure, with grim night and naked steel about it, sent a shiver through my wraps. You read of war in histories, and think it adventurous and fine, but when cold bayonet looks upon you from the dark, and you know that it is there to hold some defenceless person to his doom, the reality is nothing like so happy as the dream.

The Captain set back the wooden shutter, and held the light up high enough for me to peer within. There the rebel was, with gyves upon his wrists; whilst a rope was passed through the manger-ring, and also through his manacles. Thus he was secured

strictly in his prison, but his fetters had length enough to permit him to stretch his miserable body on the straw that was mercifully provided. He had availed himself of this, and now lay in a huddle in it, fast asleep. At the first glance I took him to be precisely what he was, a young and handsome lad, moulded slightly with an almost girlish tenderness of figure, his countenance of a most smooth and fair complexion, without a hair upon it, while to read the kind expression of his mien, he was, I'm sure, as gentle as a cherubim.

When the Captain laid the keen light fully on him, he was smiling gently in his sleep, and, I doubt not, he was dreaming of his mother or his lady.

"Why, Captain!" I exclaimed, with an indignant heat that made my companion laugh, "call you this a dangerous rebel? Why, this is but a child, and a pretty child withal. 'Tis monstrous, Captain, to thus maltreat a boy. And surely, sir, you may release the poor lad of these horrid manacles?"

My voice thus incautiously employed aroused the sleeper so immediately that I believe he almost caught the import of my speech. At least, he suddenly shook his chains and turned his head to face the thread of lantern-light. Our eyes encountered, and such a power of honest beauty prevailed in his, that my brain thrilled with joy and pity for their loveliness, and here, for the first time in my all-conquering career, my own gaze quailed and drooped before another's. Its owner was but a dirty, chained, and tattered rebel, whose throat rose bare above his ragged shirt, and whose mop of

hair seemed never to have known a law for the best part of its years ; a vagabond, in fact, of no refinement or propriety, yet when his bright, brave eyes leapt into mine like flame, the sympathetic tears gushed from me, and I was fain to turn away. The Captain divined my agitation, perhaps because my shoulders shook, or perchance he saw my cheeks a-glistening, for he let the lantern down and led me to the house in a most respectful silence. Yet every step we traversed in the darkness, the star-like look of that unhappy lad was making havoc of my heart.

When we were returned to the brightness of the candles, and I had thrown aside my cloak and hood and had recommenced the game, I turned towards the Captain to enquire :

"Captain, I suppose there will be many years of prison for that poor lad ? "

"Dear me, no ! " the Captain said ; " he is to be interrogated at the Tower, which will merely take a day or two, and then it's Tyburn Tree."

"What, they mean to hang him ? " says I in horror.

"Yes, to hang him," says the Captain,

"But he's so young," I said, "and he looks so harmless and so innocent. They will never hang him, Captain, surely ? "

"I think they will," the Captain said ; "and wherefore should they not ? He is a very arrant rebel ; he has conducted the business of the Prince in a most intrepid manner, and he further holds a deal of knowledge that the Government have determined to wring from him if they can."

"Ah, me!" I sighed, "it is a very cruel thing."

For here his lovely glance returned upon me, and it made me sad to think of it and his bitter doom. And, at least, this lad, even in ignominious tatters and captivity, contrived to appear both handsome and impressive, which is a point beyond all the fops of London, despite their silks and laces and their eternal artifice.

"Anyway," I said, "this rebel interests me, Captain. Come, tell me all about him now. Has he a birth, sir?"

"Not he," the Captain said; "merely the son of a Glasgow baker, or some person of that character."

The Captain, who had, of course, been born, said this with a half triumphant air, as though this was a *coup-de-grâce*, and had, therefore, killed the matter. And I will confess that here was a shock to the web of romance I was weaving about this charming, melancholy lad. Even I, that had a more romantic temper than the silliest miss at an academy, felt bound to draw the line at the sons of bakers.

"But at least, Captain," I persisted with, I suppose, the tenacity of my sex, "you can recall some purple thread in his disposition or behaviour that shall consort with the poetic colour in which my mind hath painted him? He must be brave, I'm sure? Or virtuous? Or wise? But bravery for choice, Captain, for a deed of courage or a noble enterprise speaks to the spirit of us women like a song. Come, Captain, tell me, he is brave?"

"He is a baker's son, my Lady Barbara."

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"I heard once of a chimney sweeper who embraced death in preference to dishonour," was my rejoinder. "Must I command you, Captain?"

"The whim of madam is the law of every man that breathes," says the soldier, with a not discreditable agility. "And as for the courage of your rebel, the worst I can say of it is this: he hath been told to choose between death and the betrayal of his friends. He hath chosen death."

"Bravo!" was the applause I gave the boy; "and now that you have proved this pretty lad to be worthy of a thought, I should like his name."

"He is called Anthony Dare," the Captain said.

"A good name, a brave name, and far too good to perish at Tyburn in the cart," says I, whilst I am sure my eyes were warmly sparkling.

The Captain and his lordship laughed at this fervour in my face, and were good enough to toast the dazzling light that was come into it.

Now in the matter of this rebel certain odd passages befel, and I am about to retail the inception of them to you. One thing is certain in reviewing these very strange affairs from the distance years have given them. It is that in 1746, in the full meridian of my beauty and renown, my lively spirit was in such excess that 'twas out of all proportion to my wisdom. A creature whose life is a succession of huzzahs hath never a reverend head nor one capable of appreciating consequences. Therefore you are not to betray surprise when you are told that I had no sooner bade my aunt and the gentlemen good evening, towards eleven of the clock, than I

gave the rein to mischief, and set about to have a little sport. Every step I ascended to my chamber my mind was on that condemned rebel in the stable with the gyves upon his wrists. I felt myself utterly unable to dismiss the look he had given me, and yet was inclined to be piqued about it too. For you must understand that his eyes had infringed a right, possessed by those of Barbara Gossiter alone. But the more I thought about this lad the less I could endure the idea of what his doom must be. Might not an effort be put forth on his behalf? To make one might be to extend the life of a fellow creature, and also to colour the dull hues of mine own with a brisk adventure, for, lord, what a weary existence is a woman's! In the act of turning the lamp up in my bedroom I came to a decision, and half a minute afterwards, when my maid, Mrs. Polly Emblem, appeared to unrobe me and to dress my hair, she found me dancing round the chamber in pure cheerfulness of heart, and rippling with laughter also, to consider how I proposed to cheat and to befool half a score right worthy persons, amongst whom were Captain Grantley and the Earl, my father.

"Let me kiss you, my Emblem of lightness and dispatch," I cried to the mistress of the robes; "for to-night I am as joyous as a blackbird in a cherry tree that hath no business to be there. I am going to be in mischief, Emblem," and to relieve my merry feelings I went dancing round the room again.

Happily or unhappily, sure I know not which, this maid of mine was not one of those staid and well-trained owls whose years are great allies to their

virtue, whom so many of my friends affect. One of these would perhaps have managed to restrain me from so hazardous a deed. Still, I'm not too positive of that, for I have an idea that when my Lady Barbarity was giddy with her triumphs and good blood few considerations could have held her from an act which she at all desired to perform. Certainly Mrs. Polly Emblem was not the person to impose restraints upon her mistress in the most devious employ, being herself the liveliest soubrette you would discover this side the Channel, with a laugh that was made of levity, and who was as ripe for an adventure as the best.

The first thing I did was to post Emblem on the landing, that she might bring me word as soon as the candles were out below, and the gentlemen retired. Meanwhile I made some preparation. I stirred the waning fire up, and then went in stealth to an adjoining room and procured from a cupboard there a kettleful of water, some coffee, and a pot wherein to brew it. The water had just begun to hiss upon the blaze when Emblem reappeared with the information that the lights were out at last, and that the gentlemen had ascended to their chambers. I bade her brew a good decoction, while I rummaged several of the drawers in my wardrobe to discover a few articles highly imperative to my scheme. To begin with I took forth a potion in a packet, a powerful sedative that was warranted to send anything to sleep; the others consisted of a vizard, a hooded cloak, and last, if you please, a pistol, balls, and powder. These latter articles I know do not usually

repose in a lady's chamber, but then my tastes always were of the quaintest character, and often formerly when my life had been so tame that its weariness grew almost unendurable, I have taken a ridiculous delight in cleaning and priming this dread weapon with my own hands, and speculating on its power with a foolish but a fearful joy. Verily idleness is full of strange devices.

"Now Emblem," says I, when the coffee was prepared, "let me see you put this powder in the pot, and as you always were an absent-minded sort of wench 'twere best that you forgot that you had done so."

"Very good, my lady," Emblem says, with a wonderfully sagacious look. And immediately she had poured the contents of the packet in the coffee. I took up the pot and said, with an air of notable severity :

"Of course, this coffee is as pure as possible, and could not be doctored any way? I think that is so, Emblem?"

"Oh! lord yes, ma'am; it is indeed," cries Emblem the immaculate.

"Well," says I, "so soon as we can be positive that the gentlemen are abed, and at their ease in slumber's lap, the fun shall get afoot."

We sat down by the hearth for the thereabouts of half an hour, that they might have ample time to attain this Elysian state. Later I wrapped the admirable Emblem up the very model of a plotter, and despatched her to the sentry on guard at the stable door, with the compliments of her mistress and a pot of coffee, to keep the cold out.

"For I'm sure, poor man," I piously observed, "it must be perishing out there in a frosty, wintry night of this sort."

"It must, indeed, my lady," Emblem says, with the gravity of a church; "and had I not better wait while he drinks it, ma'am, and bring the empty pot back? And had I not better put my carpet slippers on, and steal out carefully and without committing the faintest sound when I unbolt the kitchen door?"

"Emblem," cries I, dealing her a light box on the ears, "to-night I will discard this darling of a gown I'm wearing. To-morrow it is yours."

Faith, my Emblem ever was a treasure, if only because she was not subject ever to any bother in her soul. But when she had gone upon her errand to the soldier at the stable door, and I was left alone with my designs, for the first time meditation came, and a most unwelcome feeling of uneasiness crept on me. There was a certain danger in the thing I was determined to attempt; but then, I argued, the pleasure that any sport affords must primarily spring from the risks involved in its pursuit. That is unless one is a Puritan. Her greatest enemy has never accused my Lady Barbarity of that, however. Yet my mind still ran upon that grim guardian of the tight-kept rebel, and again I saw the night about him, and his fixed bayonet glaring at me through the gloom. Then for the second time that evening did I convince myself that adventure in the fairy-books and Mr. Daniel Defoe is one thing, but that at twelve o'clock of a winter's night their cold and black reality

is quite another. But here the imps of mirth woke up and tickled me, till again I fell a-rippling with glee. They proudly showed me half-a-score right worthy men nonplussed and mocked by the wit of woman. 'Twould make a pretty story for the town; and my faith! that was a true presentiment. But the long chapter that was in the end recited to my dear friends of St. James's I would a' paid a thousand pounds to have remained untold. But just now the mirth of the affair was too irresistible, and I laughed all cowardice to scorn. Besides, I remembered the wondrous gaze of poor Mr. Anthony Dare, that sweetly handsome youth, that desperate rebel, that chained and tattered captive, whose fate was to be a dreadful death upon the Tree. I remembered him, and although pity is the name that I resolutely refuse to have writ down as the motive for this merry plot, as all the world knows that I never had a heart in which to kindle it; but remembering that lad, I say, straight had I done with indecision, for I sprang up smartly, with a rude word for the King. And I make bold to declare that she who pulled the blinds aside an instant later to gaze into the night was the most determined rebel that ever grinned through hemp.

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CHAPTER III.

THE REBEL DISAPPEARS.

I SAW at once that the moon was come, but for my enterprise's sake I wished it absent. Here she was, however, framed in cloud, with a star or two about her, and a very tell-tale eye. The roof of the woods freezing across the park was a mass of dusky silver that her beams had thrown, and so bold and sharp her glow was on every twig that slept that individual things stood forth and stared at me, and seemed endowed with the hue of noon in the middle of the night. And I am sure the hour was laid for an adventure, and crying for a deed. The light of the moon was made of pale romance, and bade the princess bare her casement, and the minstrel on the sward to sing. This was the disposition of my thoughts as I looked out of the window, and I was so captive to their poetry that a soft touch upon my shoulder startled me as greatly as a blow. I glanced round quickly and found Emblem at my side.

"He hath drained it to the dregs, my lady," says she, brandishing the coffee-pot.

"Faith! you startled me," says I. "Emblem, your foot is lighter than a cat's."

"'Tis almighty cold under the moon, ma'am," says

the maid, "and you would be well advised, I think, to put a stouter garment on."

"Ha! sly minx," says I, "you fear that my employment will be the enemy of soft, white satin, and that it may take a soil or two."

I followed her advice, however, and got into a winter dress, and sent her meanwhile to seek a file in the region of the kitchen. This was a tool I had forgot, but highly necessary, you will believe, when a pair of stout handcuffs are to be encountered. I dressed and cloaked myself with care, and pulled two pairs of stockings on, for slippers on a frosty night are the tenderest protection. I had just perched the vizard on my nose when Emblem brought the file. I picked the pistol up, set it at her head, and made her deliver up that file with a degree of instancy which hath not been excelled by the famous Jerry Jones, of Bagshot. Thereupon I loaded that dark weapon, pocketed its adjuncts, and, leaving the faithful Emblem white and trembling with the excitement of the hour, set out upon a deed whose inception was so simple, yet whose complex development was destined to commit a great havoc in the lives of several, and to change entirely the current of my own.

Had I foreseen these ultimate occurrences, I should not have set out at one o'clock of winter moonlight in the spirit of an urchin on a holiday. Should I have set out at all? Faith! I cannot say, for the more beautiful a woman is the less restraint hath reason on her. But this I'm sure of: had my Lady Barbarity only known the strange form the business

of that night was to take for herself and others, she had certainly said her prayers before she embarked upon it.

Two clocks were telling the hour together in the hall when I rode down the broad backs of the bannisters and attained the mat below without a sound, this seeming the quietest and most expeditious way of overcoming the obstinacy of stairs, who creak at no time louder than at one o'clock at night—that is, unless it is at two. I glided across the tiles and entered the servants' part without so much as waking up a beetle, such is the virtue that resides in dainty slippers, wedded to dainty toes. Emblem had left one of the scullery doors unbarred, and through this I stole forth to the stable. The air was still as any spectre, and I observed its sacred calm so implicitly that a fox actually stalked across the yard, not twenty paces off, with his nose upon the ground, inquiring for poultry.

I was much too wise to take the stable from the front, but by dodging round divers of the kitchen offices, I was able to outflank it, and could peep upon the sentry by the door under cover of a friendly wall. Every beam of moonlight seemed gathered on that bayonet. When that naked steel looked at me thus, and seemed to say "Come on if you dare!" the spirit of my mischief was pretty badly dashed, and began to seek a pretext to retire. There was Emblem, though, and who shall endure the secret laughter of her maid? But while I paused, a gentle snore crept out into the frost and soon was mingling with my ears. The coffee had performed. In an instant what

a lion I became! How promptly I stepped up to the sentry's side and took that bayonet from him, for I could not be myself so long as that blade menaced me. I ran across the yard and cast it in an ashpit—'twas the utmost indignity I could bestow upon that weapon—and counted the feat a triumph for wit over insolence and power. Mr. Sentry had been drugged so heavily and thoroughly that he was now sleeping more deeply than the earth, as I doubt whether even morning would have waked him. The posture of his body, though, was most unfriendly to the scheme I had prepared. His head was jammed in the top corner against one door post, whilst his heels resided in the bottom corner of the other. The misfortune was that his ribs were in such a situation that they covered up the keyhole. Now unless I could obtain a fair access to that, my labours were in vain. But when engaged on a dangerous escapade, 'tis a sterile mind that lacks for an expedient. Therefore I gave back a yard or two into the stable's shadow, and looking up, saw precisely what I had hoped to find. Our stables, I had remembered, were of two storeys, the second chamber being an open hayloft, which was only covered by the roof, the sides being composed of rails alone, and set wide enough apart for persons of an ordinary stature to squeeze through with ease. How to reach it was the problem, as the floor of it was suspended ten feet from the ground. It did not remain a problem long, for I stole to a disused coach house a little distance off, and groped among the odds and ends there collected for a ladder. The brightness of the moon permitted

me to find, without the least ado, a short one, exactly corresponding to my needs. I bore it to the prison, laid it against the coping stone of the second storey, and hopped thereon as lightly as a robin hops on rime. I was soon at the top and through the bars, and battling with the armies of hay and straw assembled on the other side, that strove with might to thrust out all intruders. This one was rather more than they could manage though. Having made my footing good inside the loft, I began to search for one of those trap-doors that are employed to push the fodder through into the mangers underneath. This involved a deal of patient exploration, for it was very little light that penetrated this encumbered place. But I was now so eager and so confident, that I was fit for deeds of every character, and I do not doubt at all that had my task been to find a lost needle amongst this endless mass of provender, I should have discovered it in less than half an hour. Thus coming at last in the course of my search to a spot well cleared of straw, one of my slippers trod upon an iron ring, and, much as I regretted the pain that act involved, I rejoiced the more, since I had stumbled on the trap. Getting my fingers to this ring, I tugged the door up, and then prepared to scramble through the hole into the manger. I calculated that the distance I had to make was a comparatively short one. However, I was compelled to be cautious in the matter of the hayrack, as should I become involved in cages of that sort, I must experience many a stubborn obstacle in getting out again. I should like the reader to conceive at this point, if he is able, of

Lady Barbara Gossiter, the reigning Toast, whose imperious charms had played the deuce with every embroidered waistcoat in the town; I say I want you to conceive, dear Mr. Reader, if you have imagination equal to the task, this exquisite young person scrambling through trap-doors into mangers in the middle of the night! Yes, it staggers you, and you say it is impossible. I quite agree with that, and confess that when I started on this mischief, or this deed of mercy, call it what you will (for I certainly will not pretend to be better than I am), I had not included feats like these in my adventure. Now I have not, unfortunately, the faintest claim to be called an acrobat, but when the hounds have got scent, and the whole field is in full cry, one does not tarry for the widest and greenest pond, or the quickest set of fences. Therefore clinging tightly to the trap, I lowered myself with insidious care, inch by inch into the manger. 'Twas not possible to perform an act of this sort without committing some little noise. Thus the poor lad pinioned to the manger heard the creaks of my descent.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed, starting up as I could tell by the brisk rustling of his straw.

"No, child, not the devil," I says, "a person handsomer by far. But hush! lad, hush! I am here to save your neck."

He strangled a natural cry at this injunction, though an emotion of surprise caused him to strain unconsciously against his bonds. The rattle of the manger ring to which the unhappy creature was secured, cut me keenly to the quick. They prate of

the cruelty of us women, but I wish some of these men would consider their own gifts in this direction, ere they tax us for our drawing-room barbarities. Now Captain Grantley, in his haste to take me from the window on the occasion of my visit earlier in the night, had forgotten to reshutter it, and his omission was now a friend we could not well have done without. It let a lively flood of moonlight in, which had the cunning to shew me not only my precise locality, but how one was affected to the other, the work that was before me, and the fairest means by which it could be done.

At first the poor prisoner dare not accept the testimony of his eyes, nor could he trust his ears.

"I—I cannot understand," he said.

"Men never can," I whispered. "But if we are silent, speedy, and ingenious, I think I can save you from Tyburn, sir."

For these words he invoked God's blessing on me, which was quite a new experience, as the invocations of his sex are much the other way in my case. Then he tried to pierce my vizard with his eyes, and then rose with slow pain to his feet and pushed his handcuffed wrists towards me, for he had seen me take forth the file. I attacked at once the stout chains by which they were clinched together, and in which the cord was looped. 'Twas no light employ, let me assure you. The file rasped without surcease on the steel for the best part of an hour, and I put such an energy in the task that long before I had bitten through the gyve my fingers ached most bitterly, and I could feel the sweat shining in my face. Whoever

it was that had put those fetters on, 'twas plain he was no tyro in the art. But that winter night, had my business been to reduce a castle with my single hand, I could have razed it to the earth, I think. Therefore, at last I overcame the stubborn bonds, and in something less than a minute afterwards the desperate rebel had all his members free. I am not sure but what a bond was forged about his heart though. For in the stern assaults I had directed on his chains, the spring that held my vizard fell away, the patch of velvet dropped into the straw, and lo! at the lifting of my eyes, I stood unmasked before him. And perhaps I was not sorry for it, since—the charming fellow!—no sooner did he discover that his hands were out of durance than he uttered a low cry of pleasure and of gratitude, and when he regarded his deliverer his eyes became so bright that they must have been sensible of joy. But I was determined that in this present instance, no matter how much beyond the common, my native power should yet assert itself. Wherefore I drew myself to my fullest inches, tipped up my chin and throat a little to let him see what snow and dimples are, and what a provocation poets sometimes undergo. Then I met those fine eyes of his fully with mine own. On this occasion 'twas his that did recoil. Nor was this at all remarkable, since Mr. Horace Walpole had informed me but a week before, for the fifteenth time, that if these my orbs should confront the sun at any time, the sun would be diminished and put out. Thus the rebel's own high look yielded reluctantly to mine, and I judged by the twitching of his mouth that 'twas as much as

he could do to suppress his wonder and his thankfulness. But he did in lieu of that a thing that was even yet more graceful.

Without a word he fell on his knees before the feet of his releaser, and when I deigned to give my hand to him that he might touch it with his lips, as I thought his delicious silence not unworthy of reward, my every finger thrilled beneath the one burning tear that issued from his fine, brave eyes and plashed upon them softly.

"Madam," he said then, with his voice all passion-broken and shaking so that it must have given him an agony to speak, "a word can never thank you. May I thank you some time otherwise?"

The moonlight was much our friend in this strange passage, here amongst the straw of a cold, gloomy, and unclean stable at an unheard-of hour of night. Pouring through the window it wrapped our figures in a sweet vague hue that was as beautiful as it was subdued. It had a mellow holiness about it, too, I thought.

We lost scarce a minute, though, in matters of this character. There was much to do if the rebel's escape was to be effected and him to be hence a mile or two ere his flight was known. Wherefore I commanded him to leave his knees at once, and made him do so brisker than perhaps otherwise he might have done by saying that his attitude was extremely laughable. Next minute I had committed the loaded pistol to his care, and had informed him that as the door of the ground storey was locked and a sleeping sentry was huddled against it, egress was cut off

utterly thereby. I proposed, however, that we should get out along the route by which I had arrived—namely, by climbing up into the manger, scrambling through the trap into the loft, and descending thence by the ladder I had left.

I was the first to make the trial, as I should naturally require the most assistance in ascending to the second storey, and preferred to be pushed up by the heels from underneath than to be hauled up by the arms from overhead. 'Twas here that I was glad that the sun was not about yet, since I do no doubt that in my attempt to overcome that ugly trap, I was guilty of showing off a trifle more of petticoat and stocking than consists with the gentility of Saint James's Park. Still, I was willing to pay a reasonable price for these present delightful issues. Alas! I did not know that I was only at the threshold of this affair, and that those that lay ahead were to hold more of terror than enchantment.

We soon managed to swing ourselves from the manger to the loft, and when we got amongst the straw, I fell to further instructing my companion. It was of the first importance that he should have a horse, and I proposed to present him with Rebecca, a blood mare of my own, who was stabled near at hand. However, as we were to discover all too soon, we had reckoned without our host considerably.

Being the better acquainted with our bearings, I went ahead and led the way through the hay and straw, and in the sequel 'twas quite as well that I was foremost. For I was just come to the place where the

ladder rested, with Mr. Anthony pressing on my heels, when :

"Down, sir, into the straw!" I whispered, and smartly as that command was breathed, I was but just in time.

A stream of light rising slowly higher from the ladder was the cause of this alarm. The next thing that I saw was a lantern swinging from the topmost rung, and immediately behind it the face of Captain Grantley outlined dimly in the gloom. His eyes were fixed steadily on mine, yet the keen though quiet smile of greeting with which he met my look, and it must have been a guilty one, appeared to me a miracle of breeding and propriety.

I had to admire this soldier. Not the quivering of a muscle, not the quaking of a tone informed me of the depth of his astonishment. As for me, after the first paralysis of bewilderment I met his gaze with the large, wide look of innocence. I understand that I have a genius for dissembling. But lord! 'twas needed now. I had gone so far in the affair that I could not now withdraw. Besides, I had not the inclination. The lad was handsome, never a doubt of that. He might be the son of a baker, nevertheless he promised to make an extremely proper man. Thus I felt my heart grow small with fear, while we continued to survey each other with an ingenuous and smiling care. As for my poor terrified companion, I could tell by the soft rustling of the straw behind me that he was disposing his body as far beyond the ken of that lantern and the pair of eyes that were the background to it, as his situation would permit.

At first the imperturbability of the Captain's mien put me in some hope that he had not as yet suspected the presence of his prisoner. But he contrived to alarm as greatly as he reassured, since he pitched his voice in the very key of drawling languor that only the fops of Kensington routs and drawing-rooms employ.

"Lord! my Lady Barbara, a magnificent evening, don't you think?" says he.

"Do you suppose I would be out of my bed enjoying it unless it was, my dearest Captain?" says I, with a countenance of the most simple girlishness in the world.

The trembling prisoner burrowed the deeper in the straw.

Now it would have been a perfect piece of comedy, had not that poor lad been breathing so hard and quick behind me. His life was suspended on a hair, and this he knew, and I knew also. Otherwise I should have enjoyed the acting of this play in a fashion that my jaded appetite seldom enjoys anything. Therefore I continued to regard the Captain with a gravely whimsical look; but if he twitched an eyelid, altered the position of a finger, or shifted the altitude an inch at which the lantern hung, I began to speculate upon the fact, and wrote it in my heart. We played a game of cat and mouse, and for once the Captain was the cat. Conceive me the grey and frightened little mouse, trying to dodge the deathly paw, that any instant might descend and mutilate it.

"Captain," says I, "are you also interested deeply in the study of astronomy?"

"Astronomy!" cries he, "why astronomy?"

He was a wonderfully clever cat, but trembling little mousie had got him, by her cunning ways, a trifle off his guard you see.

"Why, my dearest man," says I, putting a world of surprise into my tone lest the moonlight should not properly reflect the amount that was inserted in my face, "do you suppose for an instant now that a woman wholly in possession of her wits would quit a warm bed at three o'clock of a winter's night to gaze at a full moon from a hay loft, if a question of the heavenly bodies had not summoned her. Do you think for a moment, sir, that I am here without a reason? Or rank somnambulism you may consider it?"

You would have laughed at the amount of indignant heat, as though I were hurt most tenderly, that I contrived to instil into my accents.

"Oh dear no, dear Lady Barbara!" says the horrid creature as silkily as possible; "that you are here without a reason I do not for a moment think. You misjudge me there, dear lady."

Captain Grantley was become the devil! I fairly raked his smiling face with the fierceness of my eyes, but when they were driven from it by the simplicity of his look, it was smiling still, yet inscrutable as the night in which we stood. His language was so ordered that it might mean everything; on the contrary it might mean nothing. This was the distracting part. The man spoke in such an honest, unpremeditated fashion, that who should suspect that he knew anything at all? But why was he here?

And why could at least two interpretations be put upon every word he uttered? These the ruminations of a guilty mind!

Hereabouts an idea regaled me. If I could but coax the Captain up into the loft, it would leave the ladder free. The prisoner then might make a dash for liberty, and if he had an athlete's body and sound wind and limbs to serve him in his flight, all was not yet lost, and he had still a chance of life.

"Captain," says I, taking a bearing cautiously, "is the supposition right that a matter of the heavenly bodies hath also brought you into the night at this unpropitious season?"

"Well, scarcely," says the Captain. "'Tis my duty, madam."

That word in its solemnity made me start. And it was spoken in a voice so pregnant and so deep that it frightened the trembling prisoner too. The violence of his emotion caused him to stir uneasily, and make the straw crack.

"Dear me!" I cried, "did you hear that mouse?" And I gathered my skirts up in my horror, and huddled my ankles one against the other in the extremity of fear.

"A mouse?" the Captain says; "must have been a very big one, dear lady. Say a rat now; liker a rat, I'm thinking."

"Oh, no," I shivered; "'twas a mouse, I'm positive. I felt his little tail against my shoe. I have no fear of rats—but a mouse, it is a frightful creature."

"That shoe must be highly sensitive, dear lady,"

says the Captain with a laugh and holding down the light. "Ah! I see that shoe is a carpet slipper. A carpet slipper on a frosty night. How odd!"

I repeat, the Captain was become the devil.

"Odd? They are indeed," says I. "That careless maid of mine actually crammed my feet in her haste into two rights inside of left and right. But a carpet slipper is a very elastic article, you know."

"Very," says the Captain, "and very secret also."

"I should think it is," says I, with an air of simple candour. "I would not use one else. You see my papa, the Earl, objects to these moonlight trips of mine. I thus use carpet slippers that he shall not hear me pass his door or walk across the hall. And I must implore you, sir, not to betray me in this matter."

Here I set such a wistful, pleading gaze upon the Captain that it nearly knocked him backwards from the ladder.

"My dearest lady!" and he laid his hand upon his heart.

Meanwhile I had not forgotten my design.

"I daresay," says I, "you would like to have one glimpse, sir, of Luna and her satellites. I have an apparatus with me. See, here's my telescope. A little darling of a creature, is it not?"

Twisting half round to where the prisoner was, I began to fumble in my pocket for it. Of course I must bend my head to do so.

"When he leaves the ladder," says I, to the lad in the softest whisper ever used, "leap out and down it like the wind; then it's neck and heels to Scotland!"

Thereupon I took the file forth from my cloak, and so disposed my hands about it that in the insufficient light it became a very creditable telescope. I fitted the point into my eye, and juttred forth the handle with great nicety.

"Venus is in trine," says I, with this strange telescope trained upon the stars.

"And how is Mars to-night?" says the Captain, with a gallant interest.

"Mars is out of season, sir," says I. "He is at no advantage. But Saturn and some others are wonderfully bright. Come up and gaze, sir. 'Twill interest you rarely, I am certain, and I have here the finest little instrument that was ever fashioned by the artifice of Italy; besides, the situation of my observatory is most admirably good."

But the very watchful cat upon the ladder betrayed no disposition to come up and hunt minutely for the mouse.

"If you will lend me the telescope," says he, "I think I shall find my present station equally excellent for the purposes of observation."

When he uttered the phrase "for the purposes of observation," he looked as simple as a child. But I had a desire to strike him from the ladder all the same. Not by a single word had he let me know as yet whether design or accident had brought him of all places to this particular ladder at this particular hour. Long as I had fenced he was as inscrutable as his *solitaire*. I was not wiser in one instance than when I had begun. Yet I was entitled to a guess, and alas! it was a gloomy one.

"Captain Grantley," says I, with a foot-tap of petulance, "I have invited you to my observatory."

"In the middle of the night," says he. It was so deftly couched that for my life I was not certain whether it was intended for a stinging insult or a very neat evasion. But though forced to admire a hit so delicate and so palpable, I was extremely angry too, for circumstances had left me entirely to his tender mercies. Yet the rebel, having heard his speech, jumped at once to the opinion that it was rather an insinuation than a subterfuge, and being a boy and therefore hot with his heroics, was mighty impetuous for what he considered the honour of his champion. And although the act would certainly have involved his life, he was quite prepared to retaliate upon the Captain's person, that I might be avenged.

Happily I divined his intention just in time. I caught the cracking of the straw, gave back a step and screamed a little, drew my petticoats together, and set one heel as heavily as I could on the up-rising rebel's breast.

"The mouse!" I cried; "there it is again. Did you not hear it, sir? Oh, I am in such horrid fear! Captain, do come up and catch it for me by the tail!"

Now my mind was so involved in the escape of this staunch and honest lad, that you will see it was quite heedless as to the degree these requests might implicate myself. In the end, however, the Captain himself proved sufficiently a gentleman to redeem me from this unlucky situation. Grantley, the town-bred fop, had just pierced me keenly with his wit; but

next moment Grantley, officer of the King, and defender of his country, came bravely to my aid.

"My Lady Barbara," says he, mildly, but abating somewhat the mincing accents of the exquisite, "I think this mummary hath gone on long enough. 'Tis a very dangerous game for both to play; and, madam, I think the more especially for you, since the more beautiful a woman is, the more perturbed the world is for her reputation. And, my dear lady, you really should consider the limitations of us poor susceptibles; we are very frail sometimes, you know. But let us have an end to the acting of this play."

"Play!" says I, with sweet surprise; "sir, to what do you refer?"

I gazed at him with perfect innocence, but I thought I heard sounds of harsh deep breathing issue from the straw behind me.

"My Lady Barbara," the Captain said, and setting the lantern a point the nearer to my face to mark the effect of his words upon it, "your conduct in this matter, I will confess, hath been exceeding creditable to your heart. But in the name of the King I summon one Anthony Dare, lying there behind you, to stand forth from that straw."

Now there was not a word in this demand beyond what I should have anticipated from the first; but my adversary had fenced and toyed with me so long, that he had almost weaned my mind from thinking that he knew of my attempt, and the poor prisoner's situation. And in the very breath of this avowal he let me see that he had ordered his tactics with so

complete a skill that the prisoner's doom was sealed. Before the final word was uttered a cocked pistol was pointed at the straw. The lad concealed amongst it, feeling that all was over, made an attempt to rise. Perhaps his idea was to throw himself upon his wary foe, but that, I saw, was certain death. He would have been shot down like a dog. Thus by the renewed pressure of my heel upon his breast, I was able to still restrain him. Indeed, I was already ploughing up my wits to find another plan. It is a part of my character never to surrender until I am compelled. Till my adversary wins, I have not lost, and the nearer he be to victory, the greater the danger that besets him.

"Captain," says I, with a meek, sad smile, "I have played my game, and I have lost it. Victory sits with you. Let me compliment you on your superior skill, sir, and crave your leave to now withdraw."

I said this as humbly as you please. I hung my head, and the limp dejection of my form betrayed how utterly I was beaten. Every spark of spirit was gone out of me, apparently. The Captain was not ungenerous, and seeing me so badly gravelled and that I took thus sincerely my reverses, was kind enough to say :

"My Lady Barbara, you have played a bold and skilful game, and I tender you my compliments upon it."

My cunning gentleman, I could see, had been taken off his guard a little by my lowliness of bearing. He did not discern that 'twas in my mind, despite the

fact that both the prisoner and myself were utterly at the mercy of his pistol, to attempt quite the boldest stroke of all.

It was now that I withdrew my slipper from the prisoner's breast and walked up in the most natural way one could imagine to within a foot of where the Captain stood upon the ladder, smiling with something of the air of Alexander. I took my steps with such discretion and feigned a simple negligence so well that he suspected nothing. My Lady Barbara being my Lady Barbara, he had of course nothing to suspect.

"I wish to descend if you will allow me, sir," says I, "for I cannot bear to stand by and see my unhappy friend retaken."

He was preparing to accommodate me in this perfectly humane request when, tightening my fingers on the file, I struck the butt of his pistol with all my strength, and straight the weapon dropped from his hand and clattered ten feet to the stones below. The prisoner at my back was marvellously quick. In almost the same instant as the pistol tinkled on the yard the lad was up. He flew at the astonished Captain like a cat, and struck him full and neat just underneath the jaw. 'Twas a murderous blow, and the horrid thud it made quite turned my stomach over. But it was not a time for niceties. The Captain tumbled backwards down the ladder, neck and heels; his lantern was shattered to a thousand atoms; and in two seconds he, the pistol, broken glass, and much good benzoline were in a heap upon the stones. The prisoner waited for

no courtesies. He did not even give his foe the chance of a recovery; for, disdaining to use the ladder, he jumped to the ground in such a calculated way that he descended with his hands and knees upon the Captain's prostrate person.

Now it was evident that much more than this was required to provide the Captain's quietus, for so soon as the prisoner fell upon his body he clasped him by the waist and clung to him with the tenacity of a leech. For a full minute they fought and wrestled on the ground and felt for one another's throats. But the Captain underneath found the arguments of the man on the top too forcible. Thus by the time that I was down the ladder the rebel had managed to extricate himself, and was running away as hard as he was able.

And here it was that Fortune treated him so cruelly. The hours he had passed in prison with limbs cramped up and bound had told too sure a tale. He was unable to move beyond half the pace a healthy and clean-limbed youth should be able to employ. And the Captain was a person of the truest mettle. Despite the several shocks he had undergone and the bruises he had suffered, he was up without a moment's pause and running the rebel down with rare agility. In his haste, though, there was a highly necessary article that he had failed to regard. That was the pistol lying on the ground beside him. And it will prove to you that I was still playing the prisoner's game with all my wits, when I say that I pounced on it, and threw it up into the hay loft, where it could be no use to anybody. Then I sped

after the pair of runners to see what the outcome was to be. They were racing through a gate that led into the park, which slept in a pale, cold silence beneath the peaceful moon.

I had not run a hundred yards when, alas! the issue grew too plain. Yard by yard the Captain bore down upon his foe. It was only a matter of minutes ere he once more had him at his mercy. But observing their movements eagerly as I went a thrill of horror trembled through my heart, for I clearly saw the fugitive clap his hand into his coat, and even as he ran, withdraw something from it secretly. He concealed it with his hand. But in a flash it was in my mind that this was the loaded pistol I had given him. And the Captain was unarmed.

If you give rein enough to mischief it may lead you into many and strange things. But I think it should always draw the line at murder. Much as I would have paid for the prisoner's escape, 'twas more than I could endure to witness a stark and naked murder. Mind, I did not enter into the merits of the case at all. I would have the lad escape at every cost, but none the less, murder must be prevented. And now I saw that the holder of the pistol was tailing off in his speed so palpably that he must soon be overtaken. There was a reason for his tardiness, however. He was waiting till his pursuer should come within a yard or two; then he would whip round and discharge the pistol straight into his body.

This idea, together with the thought that I had armed him for the deed, was more than I could suffer. A wretched sickness overtook me. But it

made me the more determined to save the Captain if I could. Therefore, I knit my teeth upon the weak cries of my terror and ran, and ran, and ran till I came within hailing distance of them, for both had now much slackened in their running. Haply the Captain had at last observed the weapon of his enemy and had interpreted his bloody motive. Thus, while the one awaited the coming of his foe, the other warily approached, but with no abatement of his courage: whilst I, profiting by these manœuvres, was soon at the place where they had disposed themselves for their battle.

CHAPTER IV.

OF AN ODD PASSAGE IN THE MEADOW.

“**F**OR the love of God, my lad, don't fire!” I cried to the rebel at the pitch of the little voice that yet was left me.

They had now halted, and stood confronting one another very close in the dewy grass of the open meadow, while the moon wrapped them in her creepy light. For, perhaps, while one might count thirty they stood apart with as little motion as the ghostly trees, in a tense and straining silence. Again I cried :

“Oh, hold your fire, my lad !” more instantly than ever. And as I thus implored him, I made a great effort to overtake and get between them. But the matter was now gone utterly beyond any control of mine. They gave me no more heed than I had been a tuft of grass. And whether 'twas that the sound of me behind him spurred the Captain to a fury, or that he risked his life from calculation, sure, I can never say, for, as I came up, without a word the Captain sprang and the prisoner shot together. At the fierce crack of the pistol the Captain fell from his full height upon the turf, and I recoiled from the report and felt all at once the wet grass tickling my face; whereon a sudden darkness filled my eyes, and I lost

the sense of where I was. For some little time I must have been insensible. But soon the blackness that pressed upon my eyelids lifted somewhat, and the buzzing in my ears abated. 'Twas then that I found myself sitting in a most quaint fashion on the grass, though the manner of my falling on that wet sward was a point more than my knowledge. A comic figure I must have cut, and I believe my earliest feeling was one of deep relief that there was but one spectator of my plight—he the Captain, who to tell the truth was in no prettier case. I was at first disposed to attribute my preposterous state to the wrought condition of my nerves, and had half arrived at the conclusion that even this pretext was insufficient for so extreme a situation, when I grew dimly conscious that a sort of fiery pain was throbbing in one shoulder. It was then I knew that I was hit. Meantime poor Captain Grantley was striving hard to rise. Twice he tried and twice he failed and fell back on the grass. The second time he groaned an oath, for his eyes had fallen on the swift figure of the prisoner fading in the dew.

“Dammy, Jimmy!” says he to himself, struggling for the third time to regain his feet and failing. “It’s no go, my lad. You are taken somewhere.”

Thereupon he sat up in the grass and began to whistle with grave bravado an odd strain from the “Beggar’s Opera.” Then my merry gentleman turned and looked at me. I also was sitting up in the grass, perhaps a dozen yards away, and was in almost an identical posture to himself, except that mine was a matter of the nerves and shoulder. But if

you could have found a more comic pair upon the surface of the earth than we made just then, I should be glad to learn their whereabouts, for to behold them would well repay a pilgrimage.

"Why, bless my soul, my Lady Barbara!" he cries in a tone of deep concern, "do not tell me that you are taken too!"

"I fear I am," says I with a great desire to swoon, for my shoulder was as hot and wet as possible.

"But not grievously, I hope," says he.

"Sure I do not know," I answered weakly. And sure I didn't! For I felt so utterly foreign at this moment to my usual confident and lively self, that I was not certain whether I was really caught at all, or whether I was about to die. The Captain, however, was not to be satisfied with this. With the aid of two hands and one knee he crawled towards me, dragging his shattered member through the grass, as stiffly as a pole, so that it seemed to trail after the remainder of his body in the manner of a wounded snake. When he reached my side, though I think I was very nearly dying for a little sympathy, he compelled me to extend all that I was expending on myself to him. The moonlight, beating fully on his face, shewed it livid and drawn with pain.

"Why, my dear man," says I, "what have you dragged yourself here to do?" For seeing him in this extremity, I forgot all about my shoulder, which really seemed to have had no more than one stroke from a whip laid on it.

"To succour you," says he, "if you will permit me!"

"Then I won't!" says I, "for 'tis you that's wanting aid."

"Psha!" says he; "a mere scratch, my dearest lady."

Now that was not the truth, for the man was in such agony that he could scarcely speak. Yet I thought his courage admirable. Here it was I made an attempt to rise on my own account, and with far better success than he. But so soon as I stood up, my head reeled and swayed and nearly brought me to the grass again.

I think it must have been the presence of the Captain that saved me from fainting on the spot. But having once fought down that supreme desire, my strength unaccountably returned, and I determined to set forth straightway to the house to procure assistance for the Captain, who was still sitting on the turf as helpless as a baby.

"I beg of you," says he, observing me to be already fit for travel, "to instruct one of your people to call my men at once."

"By my faith no," says I; "that poor lad must have as much start of you and your men as possible. Captain, you forget that I am a rebel."

"Under your pardon I do not," says he, whilst a groan rose to his lips. "And would that I might dissemble it, for this may prove a very awkward business."

'Twas a smothered threat of course, but I smiled at it demurely.

However, my present plan to assist the prisoner's escape was unluckily doomed to a frustration. A

sentry had been dispatched from the house to relieve the one on guard at the stable door. Finding him asleep and the prisoner gone, he had repaired to his comrades, and then to the Captain's room with a report of the occurrence. That bird was also flown. Thereupon the whole house was put in a commotion, somewhere on the stroke of four of the wintry morning, and the soldiers issued forth in a body to seek high and low the rebel and their officer. Three of them were now bearing down upon us in the meadow. In a word they were advised of their commander's accident and the necessity for haste. Therefore, summoning their fellows, they promptly unhinged one of the hurdles of the park and bore the Captain on it to his chamber. And as soon as they had done this, they got to horse, and galloped hotly in pursuit of the fleeing rebel, who had something less than two hours start upon them.

"We shall see him brought back before the day is out!" said the Captain confidently; "for he hath never a friend nor a horse hereby, nor a penny to procure them."

Meantime I was in a panic of alarm on my own account. To a woman of the mode a pair of unblemished shoulders are highly requisite when she repairs to Vauxhall, the playhouse, or the King's levee. No sooner did the fear oppress me that one of them was permanently mutilated, than I discarded my vapidty and went like the wind from the meadow to my chamber to resolve the matter to the test. I cannot possibly convey to you the distresses of hope and fear I suffered on that

journey. I never felt my wound at all now, and was hardly conscious of my weariness. Thus in a surprising little time I was running up the staircase to my chamber. Emblem was toasting her toes at the hearth, and was very properly asleep and dreaming of white satin. My vigorous entrance woke her, though.

"Come, wench, bestir yourself!" cries I, in my fever of alarm, "and find me the lowest-necked evening bodice I have got. Now, out with it at once and dress me in it, or, 'pon my soul! you shall not have that satin gown I promised you."

At the mention of the gown she flew to a wardrobe and produced the necessary article with a palpitating suddenness; whilst I threw off my cloak and ordered Mrs. Polly to remove the present bloodied bodice that I wore, heedless of wounds and other mortal things of that sort.

"Blood! oh, its blood, my lady!" cries Mrs. Polly Emblem; and her frightened face was mottled white and red, the very pattern of my linen, with the gory spots upon it. "Oh, you are hurt, my lady! You are dreadfully hurt, I'm certain!"

"Never you mind that," says I with a very Spartan air; "but just put me in that bodice, and tell me, for your life, whether 'twill conceal this wound or whether 'twill not. For if it doth expose the scar," I announced in a manner highly tragical, while the tears gathered in my eyes, "the reign of my Lady Barbarity is over."

"Even if it does," says Emblem, "we may powder and enamel it, my lady."

"Psha!" cries I, "there is all the difference in the world betwixt a scar and a bad complexion. Art can never obliterate a scar." And here I began to bite my handkerchief in pieces, being no longer able to contain myself.

The ensuing minute was one of the most awful of my life. It seemed as though Emblem—trembling wretch!—would never get that bodice on; but, to do her justice in this affair, and to act kindly towards her character, I must admit that she betrayed a very proper instinct in this matter. That is to say, she was as desperately seized as ever was her mistress with the fear that my peerless shoulders were torn in such a fashion that a low dress would be inadequate to hide their mutilation.

Happily, the pistol-ball had simply run along the skin and had slit it open for an inch or two, quite low down in the shoulder-blade—a mere scratch, in fact, that let out very little blood. Thus we managed to get one garment off and the other on, both easily and painlessly. Then 'twas that Emblem clapped her hands, and gave a cry of joy.

"It covers it, your la'ship, by a full two inches," she exclaimed.

"You are sure of that?" cries I in a tremor of excitement. "There must be no mistake about it, now. Bring me a mirror here that I may see it for myself."

This she did, and, though the disturbed wound was smarting horribly, I paid no attention to it until I was assured that its position was even as Mrs. Polly Emblem said. To describe the relief that my mind immediately experienced would be impossible.

"Lord, that's lovely!" cries I, and fervently kissed the cheek of Mrs. Polly to express my gratitude to good old Lady Fortune, who, I am sure, kind soul, must in her time have been a woman of the mode! But then it was that the stress of the night returned; all my weaknesses concertedly attacked me, and the pangs of my wound (though the wound was but the faintest scratch) were so aggravated by them that it appeared as if my flesh were being nipped by a hundred red-hot pincers. I sobbed out:

"Quick with a cordial, Emblem, for I feel that I must swoon!"

And faith! no sooner had I said this than I swooned in deadly earnest. I was restored in good time, though, and, having had my shoulder bathed and a plaster put upon it, I was got to bed, and slept profoundly till some time after two o'clock of the afternoon.

When I opened my eyes I saw that the room was darkened, and that anxious Mrs. Polly, Doctor Paradise (physician-in-ordinary to all the county families about), and no less a person than my Aunt, the dowager, were sitting in a row beside the bed, and looking at me solemnly.

"Good evening to you, doctor," says I, feeling perfectly restored by so sound a slumber, "or is it afternoon? or is it morning? But I daresay you propose to make a case of this."

"Well, madam," says the twinkling, old, and snuffy rogue, "you are suffering from shock, and a contused and lacerated shoulder. Therefore I prescribe rest and quiet, and would recommend that you keep your bed for at least a week."

"Then I must be pretty bad," says I.

"True, true, dear Lady Barbara," says he, insinuatingly, "although, if I may presume to say so, I think 'pretty bad' is an expression scarce adequate to your condition."

"Eh, what?" says I.

"Of course, my dear lady," he explained, with wicked emphasis, "it is the condition of your corporal body that I refer to." And the sly old villain smiled and bowed in a very disconcerting manner.

Now it does you not a tittle of service anyway to chop dialectics with your doctor. He knows everything about your way of life; your past, your future, and your present state, and he can pepper you with phrases that seem as harmless as the alphabet, if you look at them from the point of view of a physician. Yet if the world chooses to place its own construction on them, it would not feel tempted to mistake one for an archangel. In short, your doctor is not the person you should lead into a discourse in the presence of your aunt.

"Then I must keep my bed for at least a week?" says I.

"I should strongly advise it," says old Paradise.

"Indeed you would, sir," says I, sweetly; "then, Emblem, fetch me my spotted taffety. For I propose to instantly get up."

And to the indignation of my Aunt the dowager, who regarded the whole tribe of doctors as religiously as the Brahmins do their sacred bull, I suddenly renounced the sheets, sat on the margin of the

bed, and bade Emblem draw my stockings on. In my experience this hath proved the exactest mode of routing the whole infernal faculty. Do not argue with them, for their whole art consists in contriving new and elegant diseases for persons of an uncompromising health. Therefore at this moment my Aunt, with a shake of her wintry curls at me, invited the doctor to a dish of tea downstairs, and a game at cribbage afterwards. Thus before my second stocking was drawn on they had departed, but had left behind volumes of horrid prophecies of blood poisoning, high fever, and five-and-twenty other things.

"Now lock the door, my Emblem," says I, cheerfully, "and tell me every bit of news."

"If I were you, my lady," Emblem says, "I would get back to bed this instant and grow very ill indeed. For Captain Grantley is drawing a complaint up in this matter, and thinks that upon the strength of it the Government will feel compelled to arrest you for high treason and send you to the Tower."

"High what?" cries I, "send me to the where? Why, upon my soul! did any man ever speak such nonsense in his natural! As though the Government would do anything of the kind. 'Twas but a piece of mischief. I meant no harm. I'm certain I never wished to hurt the Captain, who, by the way, is much cleverer and braver than I had supposed. 'Twas but a piece of fun, I say. And if the poor lad did escape, well, he was a very pretty lad, and I am certainly not sorry. Arrest me! Send me to the Tower! Pah! the Government will do nothing of

the kind. Why, Emblem, what is it that I've done."

"Sure I don't know, my lady," says the faithful creature, beginning to whimper like a child; "you have done nothing very wicked as I can see. Of course he was a prisoner, but then there is lots of other prisoners, and plenty as big as he, and bigger if it comes to that."

"Why, of course there is, you silly goose," says I.

"And you never meant that the Captain should be hurt, my lady?"

"I would not have hurt him for the world," says I. "Now dry your eyes, my girl. The Government hath no more of a case against me than it hath against the Pope of Rome. And even if it had, it is too well bred to dare to prefer it against Bab Gossiter; besides, it is not as though there was any malice in the thing. And as you say, a prisoner more or a prisoner less doth matter not a little bit."

"But," says the foolish Emblem, weeping more than ever, "my lord is very much concerned at the Captain's disposition. Why, my lady, I heard him say not an hour ago that there is nothing to be done, and that the consequences must be faced."

"Consequences!" laughed I. "That comes of being a politician. Oh, these statesmen and prime ministers, with their grave faces. Why, if a chairman so much as puts his foot on a poodle dog in Mincing Lane, they talk of it in whispers and discuss its bearing on what they call the 'situation.' Or if a washerwoman presents her husband with a pair of healthy twins at Charing there's a meeting of the

Council to see whether that fact hath altered the aspect of affairs. And it's the nation this, and the nation that; and they talk as mysterious as Jesuits with their interminable Whigs and their pestilential Tories whom nobody understands and nobody cares a farthing for. Send me to the Tower! A set of politicians, no handsomer than clergymen and nothing like so humorous. La! Emblem, I would like to see 'em do it!"

I was both angry and amused at this idea, and got into my clothes as quickly as I could, for I was now on fire to go and see the Earl. The notion was really too absurd.

"How is the Captain now?" I inquired while I dressed.

"His knee is shattered dreadfully," the maid replied, "and he will not be able to leave this house for many weeks."

"That is good news," said I complacently. "He will be able to amuse me during these long winter evenings. But tell me, Emblem, is that poor prisoner lad reta'en? The Captain swore that his soldiers would retake him in an hour or two."

"They have not returned yet," Emblem answered.

"Excellent!" cried I; "that's made my shoulder better."

And I fell to dancing up and down the chamber in the effervescence of my mood.

CHAPTER V.

I MIX IN THE HIGH POLITICAL.

I WAS very mystified by the manner of my papa. When I tripped into his presence, I was met with that wonderful sweet politeness that was so much in the marrow of the man that at his decease a tale was put about in town that his death was delayed ten minutes by the elaborate courtesies with which he introduced himself to the Old Gentleman's attention.

Having paid me a compliment or two and discovered the good condition of my shoulder, he congratulated me on that fact, and then took a chair with such comical solemnity that I burst into laughing at the picture that he made.

"Mr. J. P.," says I, "that's excellent. Mr. Custos Rotulorum, my *devoir* to you! And I am sure your worship hath only to strike that attitude at the Petty Sessions to reform every poacher in the shire."

I rose and swept three curtseys at him, but he sat more serious than ever.

"Bab," says he, "there hath been an accident; and, my dear child, I would have given much to have prevented it."

There was a depth and brevity about these words that startled me out of my lightheartedness. I had never guessed that this old barbarian kept such a

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chord locked up in his heart. In five-and-twenty years I had not touched it till this instant, and why or how I had done so now I did not know.

Meantime I sat in silent fascination at the fine and sorrowful power that had come into his voice, and hearkened with all my ears to everything he had to say.

"Bab," says he, with a gentle smile that was intended to conceal his unaccustomed gravity, "man is a whimsical animal, I am aware. But there is one thing in him that even a woman must deal with mercifully. You have perhaps not heard of what he calls his honour. The omission is not yours, my pretty lady; your angelic sex rises superior to honour and little flippancies of that kind. But your papa suffers from his sex, and is, therefore, tainted with their foolish heresies. He hath also what he calls his honour; and a certain young person whom I will not name, but who, I may say, is as greatly celebrated for her beauty as her wit, hath quite unconsciously put her foot upon it. And that spot is so tender that she must forgive the victim if he groans."

He smiled a charming, melancholy smile, and made me think of those noble velvet gentlemen by Vandyck upon the walls of our state chambers, whom I would stand and look at hours together and make love with all my heart to when I was a little girl. To watch him smile and to hear him speaking like a most tender music, none could have discerned what his emotion was, unless one had the experience of a lifetime to bear upon his ways. And for myself, 'twas only the misgivings of my heart that told me he was in great pain.

"What is it that I've done, my lord," cries I, feeling that he must have been furnished with a very highly coloured picture of my deeds.

"I gave my word to the King," he answered me, "that I would succour his soldiers here at Cleebby for a night, and take the prisoner that they held into my keeping faithfully. Instead of that I send my maid to drug the sentry; I go out in a pair of carpet slippers in the middle of the night; I set a ladder up against the hayloft; I climb up there, and, by means of dropping through a trap into a manger, I get into the prisoner's cell and let the prisoner out; I furnish that prisoner with a pistol; I disarm an officer of the King, and cause him to be shot severely in the knee, and enable the prisoner to escape. It is in this manner that I redeem my promise to the Government of His Majesty the King."

"You, my lord!" cries I, aghast, and doubting whether he had the proper enjoyment of his mind. "Pray shatter those delusions! I, my lord—I, your daughter Bab, did that, and I can show you the wound upon my shoulder that I got." And here I chanced to sneeze, and turned it into evidence.

"And that, my lord," says I, "is the mortal cold I've caught from those carpet slippers. I put them on for fear of waking you, sir."

"Bab," says he, in a wooing voice, "was it you who made that promise to the King?"

"Certainly not," says I in triumph, "for do you suppose that I would have thus amused myself had I done so? I told the Captain I was a rebel from the first."

"Then that confirms all that I have said," says he, "and I have informed the Captain that you count for nothing in this matter, and 'twas I who let the prisoner out."

"Which, under your pardon, you never did," says I, misunderstanding him. "I took the risks and I'll have the glory. 'Twill be published in the *Courier* that that audacious wretch Bab Gossiter let out a dangerous rebel in the middle of the night, at her father's country seat, by outwitting nimbly a well-known officer of His Majesty. They will put me in a ballad, and sell 'em two a penny in the Strand. Sylvanus Urban will have a full and particular account of me in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and for a whole nine days I shall be as variously known as Joan of Arc or wicked Mrs. Molly Cutpurse."

"But 'twill be said," says he, "that Mrs. Rumour hath lied as usual, and that she hath been quite put out of countenance by the fact that the Earl of Longacre, her peerless ladyship's papa, hath confessed in his own person to this treason; that he hath stood his trial upon it at Old Bailey; hath been found guilty, and therefore stands committed to the Tower."

"Papa," says I, severely, "you are become profane. Do not jest with such sacred names as 'High Treason,' 'Old Bailey,' and the 'Tower.'"

"Bab," says he, "a woman's head is far too pretty to understand these ugly matters. But 'tis enough that 'twas I that let that prisoner out in the middle of the night; 'tis my name that Captain Grantley has done me the special favour of inserting in his dispatches to the Minister of War,

and it will be my body that will be committed in dishonour to the Tower. And now, my pretty Bab, suppose we wash our hands of these dirty politics, and solace ourselves with a little game of backgammon and a dish of tea?"

There was only one person in the world that this delightful mirror of the graces could not deceive with his urbanity. She chanced to be his daughter Bab. That young person's eyes could penetrate his embroidered vest and look into his heart, or any substitute that he wore for that important organ. His countenance I never saw more easy and serene, and was good enough to cheat the devil with, but behind that mask his every nerve was quivering with an agony of shame. His sensibility to politics astonished me. This worldly man, this polished heathen, this ancient fop, this hard-bit *roué*, who feared not God nor anybody; this scandalous Court chronicle of sixty years of Stuartry to be laid prone and bleeding by a frolic of his daughter Bab's! 'Twas impossible, you'll say, and that is what I also said, but there it was.

"Oh, these politics!" cries I, in a passion. "A pestilence upon 'em! Confound these politics! And what in the world is there to make so wry a face about, my lord? The matter might be serious. Do I not repeat, sir, that the thing was but a piece of mischief? Call it fun, my lord, bravado, diablerie, what you will, but I want you to understand that 'twas a piece of mischief."

"'Tis perfectly correct," says he; "an infernal piece of mischief."

"Then might I ask, my lord, what there is to make a song about? True, the rebel is escaped, but I'm not sorry in the least for that; indeed, betwixt ourselves I am somewhat glad of it. He is a very handsome lad, and will make a prettier man than any that I've seen. But what is there to make a ballad of, I ask? Is he the only rebel in the world then? There are thousands of rebels up and down the earth, and I'm sure not a man jack of 'em's so handsome as that lad. Why," laughs I, "he hath an eye that is a rival to my own. No, 'twould not be truthful of me to say that I am sorry for it. As for the bullet that traversed Captain Grantley's knee, I do indeed regret that very deeply, but I ask you, my lord, is his the first knee that hath had a bullet through it? And is it going to be the last? Why at that same instant a portion of the same discharge hit my shoulder too, so he is not the only sufferer. Pah! 'twas only a piece of mischief, and my maid Emblem will tell you quite the same, and she should know, for she put my cloak on and saw me down the stairs. Why, if it comes to argument, my lord, the King, nor you, nor politics, nor precious Captain Grantley hath a leg to stand on, and 'tis argument they say that is the only thing that is considered in a court of justice. Come, tell me is it not so, Mr. Custos Rotulorum?"

"Faith, that is so!" laughed his lordship heartily, and he hath been on four occasions High Sheriff of the County; "and if they shall find a lawyer who may prevail against this argument of yours, my delightful criminal, it will have to be a woman, a second Portia let us say. for the man hath not been

fashioned yet who could possibly chop logic with you ; nay, nor if it comes to that," and my papa stood up and bowed to the bright buckles of his shoes in the most flattering fashion, "the combined genius of our sex could never hope to overcome in argument the dialectics of you fair, unfathomable, amazing ladies."

Yet despite his smiling speeches the hard-wrought look still sat in his eyes. Then I grew Tower-haunted. Could it be possible that my frolic had so greatly shocked old, indignant, sober-sided Politics? But if any proof were needed to the Earl's assertion that my night's work was criminal, it was at my elbow. On the table I saw a sheet of the official blue with a brief statement of the prisoner's escape upon it. It was a rather garbled version, for the name of me, prime agent and offender, was not allowed to once appear; nor were the inconvenient details set down at any length, but in the sum it said that the whole of the responsibility rested with my papa, the Earl, and he had affixed the peculiar scrawl that was his signature upon this preposterous indictment. The familiar way in which this was irresolutely writ, in his trembling, old and gouty hand affected me most strangely. There seemed a sort of nobility about the behaviour of this old barbarian; and a strain of the hero in a man delights me more than anything, and generally fills me with a sort of emulation.

"This means the Tower!" says I, brandishing the paper.

"It does," my lord says, inclined to be amused at my impetuosity.

"Then, sir," says I, "I will be mentioned in it

fully as is my due. I did the deed, and I will take the recompense. If its reward is to be the Tower, I will claim it as my own. Therefore erase your name from this document my lord, and insert the name of her who hath duly earned her place there."

"Nay Bab, not so," says he. "I gave the soldiers of the King my hospitality, and now they must give me his."

"Which they never shall," cries I, with my cheeks a-flaming. "I will go and see the Captain and insist upon his keeping to the truth. Oh, these politics! 'Tis well said that there is no such thing as rectitude in politics. But in the meantime I will draw the teeth out of this wicked document to prevent it committing harm."

And under the nose of its custodian I screwed the paper into a ball, and planted it calmly in the blaze. Having watched it thoroughly consumed, I swept from the room to bear the Captain, and left "laughter holding both his sides" in the person of his lordship, who quoted Horace at me or some other, whom I have not sufficient Latin to locate or to determine. 'Twas about the Sun-God Apollo and his tender sentiments towards some deity with a cheek of fire.

I found my worshipful friend the Captain in occupation of the library. He was dressed rakishly in lavender and in a peruke that flourishes most in Chelsea and such-like Southern places. His shattered knee was strapped upon a board, and though his face was pinched with pain, it was anything but woeful when he gazed up from the writing-table at which he sat, and beheld me glide into the room.

He was monstrous busy with a full-feathered quill

upon a page of foolscap the twin to the one to which my papa had signed his name, and that had been so considerably burned.

I asked him of his hurt, and he questioned me of mine. Both, it seemed, were recovering excellently well. Then says I with that simplicity which is perhaps the most insidious weapon of all that I possess:

"My dear Captain, I have just seen a paper identical to the one you are now engaged upon, in the room of my papa. I call it very thoughtful of you to suppress my name in the manner that you do. Am I to suppose?" I inquired, with an eagerness that he noticed with a gleam of pleasure, "that you have treated my part in last night's affair as kindly in this document that you are now preparing?"

"Look, my dear lady, for yourself!" cries he, happy in his own adroitness. "I will wager that you shall not find your name once mentioned in it."

My gentleman handed five close-writ sheets of foolscap to me to examine for myself. I scanned every page, and saw that it was even as he said, and that the case, a black one in all conscience from the point of view of politics, and quite enough to hang even a peer of the realm upon, was made out entirely to the prejudice of his poor old lordship.

"'Tis true, Captain," says I, "that there is not a word of me within it. And last night at Cleebly without Bab Gossiter, is like the tragedy of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. 'Tis utterly worthless, sir. As a truthful narrative it is inadequate, but is none the less a very pretty fairy-tale. But in this cold and unromantic age of Politics, pleasing fictions are

popular. Therefore, dear Captain, I think it better that it were suppressed. And I do not doubt if it be any consolation to you, sir, for the futile pains you have spent upon this document, that one day all the Prime Ministers and Privy Councillors, and stout Whigs and arrant Tories, and every kind of politician that ever was or ever will be, will fizzle just as briskly and completely together in another hemisphere, as these five papers this instant do in this."

And in the course of this decisive statement I tucked the five papers deeply in the grate, saw them turn black in a twinkling, and then turned round to enjoy the industrious writer's countenance.

To prove how little this summary deed affected him he selected another sheet without granting me a word of any sort, took a new dip of ink and calmly re-began his labour.

"Come, sir," says I, tartly, "do you not see the nonsense of it? You know quite well, Captain, it was I who wrought the mischief of last night; and if it hath earned Old Bailey and the Tower, I am determined not to flinch from my deserts."

"My Lady Barbara," says he, with an elegance that disarmed my anger, "it is the desire of his lordship and my humble self to spare so much wit and beauty these indignities. Besides, one really must be considerate of the Justices. Assuming that the Court found you guilty of this crime, there is not a Judge upon the Bench with sufficient tenacity of mind to pass a sentence on you."

"Why, of course there's not," says I, complacently. "I foresaw that all along."

But there was indeed a conspiracy between these gentlemen, and I tried very hard to break up this cabal, that I might stand or fall upon the consequences of my act. Now when I was a very little girl I had only to stamp my foot, and dart a fiery glance or two to obtain my way with any man, beginning with my papa, the Earl. And from that time, either in London or the country, whether the unresisting male was a marquis or a hosier, I had only to grow imperious to bend him to my will. But now old Politics, that square-toed Puritan, was here, and a pretty game he played. For the first time in my history I could not persuade, direct, or browbeat my papa, who was the best-brought-up parent of any girl's in England. And then there was this foppish officer, who would have died for me in Kensington, as inflexible as steel before my down-right anger.

"Captain," says I, for the tenth time, "I never saw such monstrous fables as are put into these papers. And I give you warning, sir, that if these falsehoods are sent to London, and the soldiers come for my papa, the Earl, I will post to town myself, and tell the judges all about it privately."

"I suppose you mean the Government?" says he, smiling for some reason.

"Judges, Government, and King, I'll see 'em all!" cries I, fiercely, "for they're all tainted with the same disease, and that disease is Politics. And I'll accost every power in the kingdom rather than my lord shall go to prison in the room of me. And Captain, I would have you prepare yourself, as you are the

person I shall call in evidence to prove 'twas I who let the prisoner out."

"Madam does me great honour," says the silken villain, "but all I know of last night is that the prisoner escaped. I do not know who enabled him to do so, and I do not greatly care. But 'twas a member or members of his lordship's household, and the entire responsibility rests with that gentleman."

As the Captain desired to continue with his writing, I thought it the more graceful to withdraw. This I did, and shut myself up in privacy, for my mind was filled with grave considerations. In a day and a few hours over, my existence had become a terribly complicated matter. There was the prisoner. My life had long been waiting for a man to step into it. A man last night had done so, and I wished that he had not. For in spite of myself, all my thoughts were just now centred in his fortunes. Would he escape? And if he were re-taken? That second question sent a new idea into my head, and straight I went and consulted the Captain on it.

"If," says I, "the prisoner is brought back by your men, sir, you will not need to report the matter of his escape to the Government?"

He looked at me quickly with a keen twinkle in his eye that appeared to spring from pleasure, and then answered glib as possible:

"That event will indeed supply an abrogation of this unpleasing duty. But he must be retaken within a week. Understand that, my Lady Barbara. If he is not in my hands within that period there is nothing for it but to dispatch these papers to the King."

My question seemed so exactly to his mind that he could hardly restrain a chuckle. But I soon provided a bitter antidote to his satisfaction.

"Captain," says I, "I hate you. I would rather have one hand cut off than that poor prisoner should be brought back and hanged at Tyburn in his shame. And I would sooner the other hand should perish too than that the Earl, my father, should be committed in his age in dishonour to a gaol. Captain, I repeat, I hate you!"

I meant every word of what I said, and my voice made no disguise of its sincerity. And at last I had found a tender place in the Captain's armour. My words left him livid as his wig. At once I saw why he was affected so. The Captain was in love, and the object of his passion had just told him in the frankest terms how much she was prepared to sacrifice for the sake of another man. I will admit that my handling of the Captain was not too tender. But let us grant full deserts, even to the devil. I had hit the Captain pretty hard, but beyond a slight betrayal of its immediate shock, the blow was accepted beautifully. Without a word he went on writing, and in despite of the cruel situation he had put me in, and the hatred that I bore towards him, he forced me to admire his nature in its silken strength. And for that night at least I could not rid my brain of the picture that he made, as he sat writing his dispatches in the library with the lamp and firelight playing on his livid face and his increasing labours. I began to fear that a second man had come into my life.

CHAPTER VI.

I CONTINUE MY NIGHT ADVENTURES.

[F the prisoner were retaken in a week, the Earl, my papa, would have a pardon! This was indeed a grim fiat to take to bed and sleep upon. What was this rebel to me that I should be so concerned for him? Why should he not perish at Tyburn for his deeds, as had been the fate of more considerable men? He was but a baker's son. I had only exchanged a glance and a few broken sentences with him in all my life, yet never once did I close my eyes that night but I saw him in the cart and the topsman preparing to fulfil his gruesome offices. More than once had curiosity prompted me to sit at a window with my friends, as was the fashion, and watch these malefactors hang. A kick at space, and all was over! But this handsome youth, with the fiery look, a baker's son, who had committed crimes against the State—must he, a child, be strung up in ignominy? Brooding on this horrid matter through this interminable night, I grew so feverish and restless that sleep was banished utterly. At last I could endure my bed no more. I rose and covered up my nightrail with a cloak, relit the lamp, and read the timepiece. It wanted twenty minutes to three at present.

"Faugh!" I pondered, "these lonely speculations are so unendurable that I will fetch Emblem to bear me company the remainder of the night."

But everything outside seemed muffled in such silence as with the hush of snow, that ere I started for her chamber I drew the blinds up of my own and looked out into the park.

Snow indeed! Quite a fall of it, though it now had ceased. The moon was shining on the breadths of white; every tree stood up weird and spectral, and such a perishing cold presided over all that the whole of Nature seemed to be succumbing to the blight of it. The lamp I held against the pane struck out for a quarter of a mile across the meadows and revealed the gaunt, white woods of Cleebly sleeping in the cold paleness of moon and snow. The night appeared to hold its breath in awe at the wonderful fair picture the white earth presented. And very soon I did also, but for a different reason.

To my left hand a hedge that stood a distance off was plainly to be seen. Suddenly a figure emerged stealthily from under it. 'Twas that of a man, who after looking cautiously about him began in a crouching and furtive fashion to approach the house.

He came creeping slowly through the snow, and at every yard he made it seemed as much as ever he could do to drag one leg behind the other. Once he stopped to listen and observe, and apparently heard sounds that did disquiet him, for he speedily resumed his motion, and at a more rapid pace than formerly. His form grew sharper and clearer as he came, and soon the moonlight fell on it so distinctly

that I presently recoiled from the window with a thrill of very horror. It was the fugitive!

I think I was more frightened than surprised. During the weary vigil of that night this wanderer had held such entire dominion of my thoughts that after my brain had been fretted into a fever on his account, it seemed one of the most natural consequences to step from my bed and discover the cause of my distraction coming towards me through the night.

I quite supposed that his enemies had managed to turn him from the north, and that finding himself without money or any resources for escape, he had returned to Cleeby to implore the aid of the only friend he had in the cruel country of his foes. Yet his movements were so mysterious that I was by no means certain that this was so. Instead of coming underneath the window in which the blinds were up and a lamp was burning, that he should have known was mine (my figure must have been presented to him as clearly as by day), he renounced the front of the house entirely and turned into a path that led to the stables and kitchen offices on the servants' side.

To try and find a motive for his action I pulled up the casement softly and thrust my head forth into the stinging air. Certain sounds at once disturbed the almost tragic hush, and assailed my ears so horribly that I hastily withdrew them and shut the window down. The poor lad's pursuers were shouting and holloaing from a distant meadow. In half an hour at most they must run the wretch to

earth, for they were horsed, and he was not; besides, his painful gait told how nearly he was beaten.

They say that the deeds of women are the fruit of sentiment, and after this strange night, I for one, will not dispute with the doctors on that theory. There was no particular reason why I should give a second thought to the fate of this hunted rebel, this baker's son, this proletariat. Nay, the sooner he was retaken the better for myself and my papa. Yet at three of the clock that snowy morning I did not review his end with such a cold, complacent heart. His affairs seemed very much my own. Once when I had played the friend to him his brave eyes had delighted and inspired me. No, I would not sit down tamely and let him perish. Why should I—I whose spirit was adventurous?

Therefore, my determination taken, I wisely put the lamp out, that its brightness might not attract attention from those enemies scouring the fields, then proceeded silently but swiftly to get into my clothes. Never was I drest less carefully, but haste meant the salvation of a friend. Warmly shod and clad, I descended the stairs with expeditious quietude, groped to the left at the bottom of the staircase, through dark doors and the ghostly silence of moonlit and deserted passages, until I reached the kitchen part. Soon I found an outer door, unlocked it, slipped the bolt, and stepped into the night. The slight, soft breathing of a frost wind came upon my face, and a few straggling white flakes rode at intervals upon it, but only a film of snow was on the yard, of no more

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consistency than thistledown, but the sharp air was wonderfully keen.

However, 'twas precious little heed I paid the elements. The shoutings of the soldiers from the meadows was even distincter than before, and by that I knew the men were moving in the direction of the rebel and the house, and that if I hoped to put the lad in some safety not an instant must be lost. First, though, I had to find him.

I peered particularly on all sides for the fugitive, but failed to discover a solitary trace, and yet there was such a lustre in the hour's bright conditions that the yard was nearly as luminous as day. Sure I was, however, that he must be close at hand, and accordingly was mighty energetic in my quest. And I had taken twenty steps or less when my eyes lit on a stable with an open door. Immediately I walked towards it, and as I did so, remembered that this was the very prison in which the lad had been previously held. This time there was not a bayonet and a sentry to repulse one, else a strategy had been called for; but, walking boldly in, I was rewarded for my labours. The prisoner was lying in the straw in the very posture of the night before. No sooner was my shadow thrown across his eyes than he rose to his feet with every evidence of pain, and, casting the pistol I had lately given him upon the ground, said:

"All right, I am taken; I submit without resistance."

"On the contrary, my friend," I answered angrily, being bitterly disappointed of his character, "you are not taken, other than extremely with your cowardice.

You do not care for fighting at close quarters, I observe. Bah!" and I turned my back upon him.

"My benefactress!" he cried, in a strangely altered tone, "my benefactress! What do you here at this place, and at this hour?"

"What did I here before?" I said in scorn. "And why, sir, may I ask, are you not footing it to Scotland, as I ordered you, instead of returning in your tracks? I suppose it is, my gallant, that rather than help yourself, you would choose to throw yourself upon the mercy of a friend, heedless of what degree she is incriminated so long as she can contrive to shield your valuable person. So you submit without resistance, do you?"

He was very white and weary, and his breast was heaving yet with the urgency of his flight, but it pleased me to discover that my speeches stung.

"As you will, madam," he answered, with a head upthrown, but also with a quietude that had a fire underneath, "as you will; but you are a woman and my benefactress, and I bend the knee before you."

"Not even *that*," says I. "Do you suppose I will take a coward for my servant?"

"Madam," says he, "say no more of this, for perhaps you would regret it at another time; and, madam, do you know that you are the last person in the world that I would have regret anything whatever? You have been so much my friend."

"Thank you," says I, bitingly; "but, Mr. Coward, you infer that when I act in the capacity of your

friend I enjoy a privilege. Let me assure you I am deeply honoured by it."

"Oh," says he, "how good of you to think so!"

This was staggering simplicity, for I judged him to be too young to be ironical.

"But hark!" says he, "I hear soldiers shouting and approaching. I must beg you, madam, to leave me to my fate; but do not think too hardly of my cowardice."

"Then I will not leave you to your fate," says I. "'Tis not in my nature, however I may despise your character, having once befriended you to desert you at the last. I came forth in this wintry night especially to save you, and that is what I'll do."

"No, no, madam," he replied, "I will not have you further prejudice yourself with his Majesty for the sake of me."

Now I could only accept this answer as something of an outlet for his wounded feelings, seeing that he must be back in his present spot expressly to implore my further aid.

"Mr. Coward," says I, "I think you will, and readily, when you reflect that certain death awaits you, should you spurn my offices."

"I think not," says he with a stoutness that astonished me.

"You think not!" cries I, "why, what in wonders' name hath brought you back to the very spot you started from, if 'tis not to beseech my farther aid?"

"Madam," he said, "had you refrained from my defamation I would not have told you this. But I will, to clear my name, for I could not bear to walk the scaffold with such a stigma on it."

"Bravo!" says I; "boy, you use the grand manner like an orator. What was the school in which you learnt your rhetoric?"

"'Tis the very one in which you learnt your gentleness," says he.

Being at a loss to answer him I made haste to turn the theme by warning him of his foes' approach and his great danger.

"The sooner they are come," he said, "the better I'll be suited. But if you must know why I am here to-night, 'tis you that brought me, madam."

I put my finger up and said: "Pray be careful, Mr. Coward, or I shall not believe you,"

"When my enemies four times foiled me," he said, "in my attempts to make the north, and feeling that I had neither friends nor money in the south, that there every man would be my enemy, I knew that sooner or later I must be caught. It then occurred to me that your kindness, madam, towards a rebel had probably exposed you to a severe penalty from a Government that respects not any person. Wherefore, I thought, should I deliver up my body in the very prison that I had lately broken, without any prejudice to my foes or to myself, the matter might be simplified, and as no one had been incommoded, your pardon would perhaps be made the easier."

I knew this for the truth, as the simple and deep sincerity of his words cast me in a miserable rage at my own impulsiveness. This speech had taught me that his behaviour, instead of being craven, verged perilously near the fine. And of course in the height of the mortified anger that I indulged against myself,

the moon must choose that moment to throw her rays about the lad's white face, that made it even sterner and stronger than before.

"And," says I, "had it not been for thoughts of me, what had you done when you found your plight extreme?"

"A bullet would have done my business," he answered with an eager, almost joyful, promptness, that showed how welcome to him was that prospect of escape. "Anything is kinder than Tyburn in the cart. Madam, I would have you believe that even I have my niceties, and they draw the line at the ignominy of the mob."

I chewed my lips in silence for a time, and you may be sure should have been very willing to forget the epithet I had so unsparingly clapped upon his conduct.

"My lad," says I, "confound you! Why couldn't you contrive to let me know, you unreasonable being, that a deed like this was in your mind. You wretched men are all alike, so monstrously unreasonable! How should I know that when you threw your pistol down you were trying to play the gentleman? I say, confound you! But here, here's my hand. Kiss it, and we'll say no more about it."

The lad went gallantly upon one knee in the straw, like a very well-bred person, and did as he was bidden, with something of a relish too.

"Mr. Baker's Son," says I, "I confess that I should be glad to see you rather more diffident at the audacity of this; and a little more humbly rejoiceful in your fortune. For, my lad, you are the first of

your tribe and species to be thus honoured. And you will be the last, I'm thinking."

"I am none so sure of that," says he, with a marvellous equanimity, "for that depends upon my tribe and species. If they ever should desire to kiss your hand, I reckon that they'll do so."

"Don't be saucy, sir," says I, and put an imperious warning in my tone.

"Humph!" says he, "I'll admit it is a nice, clean, white one, and not so very fat. But when all is claimed, 'tis but a mortal woman's."

"Come, sir," I says, "this is not the time for talk. Not an instant must we lose if you are to escape the soldiers."

"But, madam, I do not intend to escape them," he replied.

This startled and annoyed me, and promptly did I show him my displeasure.

"Nay, madam," he said, "you have risked too much on my account already. I repeat, it was to lessen your culpability that I am come back to my prison. Therefore, can you suppose that I will allow you to farther incriminate yourself?"

"Bah!" says I, "you had not these scruples formerly."

"No," says he, "and it is my shame. I was unthoughtful."

"And do you suppose," says I, "that if so much as my little finger were endangered in your service, that I would risk it?"

"You would," says he, "for your high temper is writ upon your face. If my shoe required buckling,

and she who buckled it did so at the peril of her neck, you would attempt the deed if you had the inclination. Ha! madam, I think I can read your wilfulness."

For the moment I was baffled, as I had to admit that he read it very well.

"The danger," I rejoined, "is quite nothing, I am certain. My papa, the Earl, hath a great interest with the Government. He can turn it round his little finger."

"Can he so?" says he. "Then let him procure my pardon, for I would not willingly risk again the safety of his daughter."

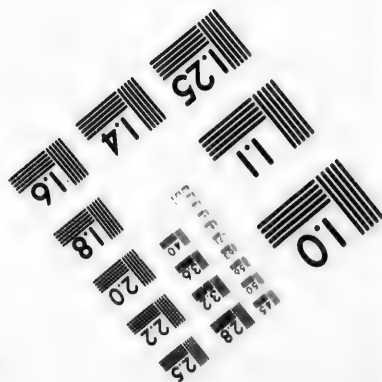
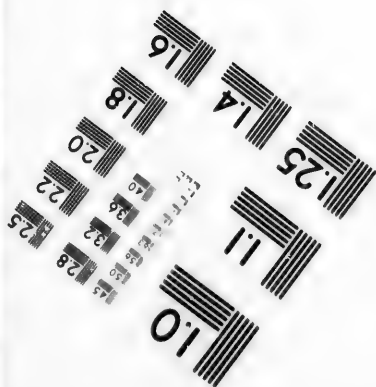
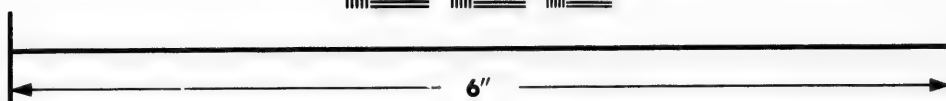
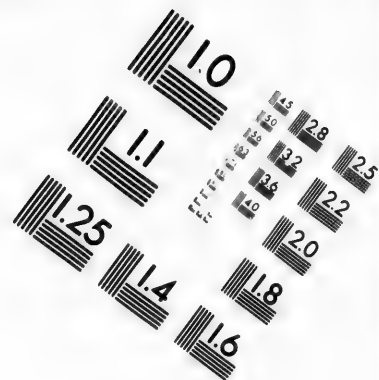
"He would not procure your pardon," I replied, "for the good reason that he abhors all rebels and their work. Yet he is strong enough to protect his daughter if the need arose."

This was flat lying, I believe, but when one is hard pressed one is rather summary with truth.

The lad was immovable as rock, though. His conduct threw me in a pet of downright anger and alarm. Having made my mind up long ago to save him if I could, and having planned it all so perfectly, 'twas not my disposition to let his foolish scruples interfere.

"My lad," says I, flashing out at him, "any more of these absurdities and you will put me in a thorough rage. Come, we must not lose an instant now. Why do you view your life so lightly?"

"I only view it lightly where your safety is concerned, dear lady," he replied, with a spice of the proper gallantry.



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"It would require a person of a higher calibre than yours to affect it any way, either with the world or with the Government," I answered, harshly. "My Lady Barbara Gossiter is able to take care of herself, I'll hazard."

"My Lady Barbara Gossiter!" he echoed, "whew! this is interesting. Now madam, do you know that I took you for a great lady at a glance! But I'll confess that I thought you scarcely such a personage."

I should have liked this confession better had there been more of embarrassment about it. But this baker's son was as greatly at his ease as ever. I laughed and said: "Sir, you should reserve your judgment of my qualities until you see them underneath the candelabra instead of underneath the moon. But I think you will admit, sir, that I am one who should be strong enough to shield herself against the State if necessary."

"Madam," says he, and his proposal staggered me, "I will put my life in your hands once more on this condition: that you swear solemnly upon oath that you shall run no danger in my affair."

Was anything more delightfully or more boyishly naïve? I fear that I should have betrayed some laughter had he not worn a face of gravity that said my word would have been unaccepted had I give him reason to suppose I was not equally as serious as he.

"Swear," says I, "of course I'll swear. There is not the remotest peril in the case." I think it was a miracle that choked my mirth back.

"Very well," says he, with a boon-conferring air, "I will remit myself entirely to your hands."

"'Tis very good of you to do so," says I, remarkably relieved, yet even more amused. "And now then follow me, sir, and I will take you into safety."

But alas! we had tarried over long. Escape was now cut off. I had no sooner stepped outside the stable than I fled back in such a haste of fear that I nearly fell into the arms of the fugitive, who was obediently following. For the soldiers had arrived at last, and I could see them leading their weary horses across the yard in the very direction of this block of stables that we occupied.

"Up, up," I whispered my companion, "into the manger, force the hay-trap and mount into the loft! Up, I say! Can't you hear their feet upon the yard?"

"After you," says he, "I would not have these men see you for the world."

"Oh, what madness, boy!" I cried; "don't you hear them coming. Another moment and you are ta'en. 'Tis you, not me, they're seeking."

"Madam, after you," says he.

"Then I won't," says I; "I will not be badgered by anybody."

'Twas then that this delightful youth acted in a way that I could never sufficiently admire. He drew up his form and looked upon me with all the majesty of six husbands made in one, and pointed with his finger to the trap. "Madam," says he, in a terribly stern voice, "you will go up first, for I'm infernal certain I won't!"

At another season I must have dallied to enjoy the

situation ; but, knowing that the life of so remarkable a boy depended wholly on my obedience, I went up willy nilly.

With his assistance, I had soon scrambled into the manger, and had been pushed most comically upwards through the trap ; whilst he came on my heels with a cat's agility, the pistol in his teeth. On the instant we composed ourselves in security in the straw, and in such a posture that we could enjoy a full view of the trap, peer down there through, and observe the movements of our enemies should they enter the lower chamber.

As it proved, we were not a second too early in our hiding. A clattering of hoofs announced that the horses were come to the stable door ; and it was to our dire misfortune that their riders here dismounted and held a council, whose import was the reverse of comforting. Leaving their animals outside, they sought the protection of the stable against the bitter air, and without restraint discussed their future courses. From our vantage in the upper chamber we looked down and listened with all ears through the trap ; and, as they had evidently not the least knowledge of our presence there, we felt quite a keen enjoyment in the situation, which was terribly dashed, however, by the resolution they arrived at.

"You men," says one, with the authority proper to a corporal—Corporal Flickers was his title, as later I learned to my sorrow—"you men, this fox is a knowin' varmint. Why did he come back here? I puts it to you. Why did he come back here?"

"'Cause o' me lady," was suggested by one of his companions.

"Eggsac'ly," says the Corporal. "George, you're knowin' you are, you take my word for that. 'Cause o' me lady. And if I was to have a free hand wi' my lady, what is it I'd do to her?"

"Screw her blazin' neck," suggested the same authority.

"Eggsac'ly," says the Corporal; "screw her blazin' neck. George, you're knowin' you are. Oh the air'stocracy! They never was no good to England, and durn me if they don't get wuss. Never did no honest labour in their naturals. Lives high; drinks deep—ow! it turns me pink to mention 'em. It does, George Marshal; it does, John Pensioner; fair congests my liver. And fer brazing plucky impidence their wimmen is the wust. This here ladyship in perticular, a sweet piece isn't she? Never does a stitch o' honest labour, but sucks pep'mint to find a thirst, and bibs canary wine to quench it. And it's you and me George, you and me John, as pervides this purple hussy wi' canary wine and pep'mint. Us I say, honest tillers o' the land, honest toilers o' the sea, as is the prop o' this stupenjuous air'stocracy. It's we I say what finds 'em in canary wine and pep'mint. Poor we, the mob, the scum, the three-damned we what's not agoing to hevving when we dies. But who's this ladyship as she should let a prisoner out in the middle o' the night, and sends six humble men but honest a-scurin' half Yorkshire for him. As Joseph Flickers allus was polite he'll not tell you what her name is, but do you know what Joe'd do if

he had a daughter who grew up to be a ladyship like her?"

"Drown her," Mr. George modestly suggested.

"George," says the Corporal in a tone of admiration, "you are smart my boy, downright smart, that's what you are! Drown her's what I'd do, with her best dress and Sunday bonnet on. I should take her so, by the back of her commode, gently but firmly, George, and lead her to the Ouse. And then I should say, 'Ladyship, I allows you five minutes fer your prayers, for they never was more needed; because, ladyship, I'm agoing to drown you, like I would a ordinary cat what strays upon the tiles at nights, and says there what she shouldn't say. Ow, you besom wi' your small feet and your mincing langwidge, you should smell hell if Joseph Flickers was your pa!"

Now I have sat long and often in a playhouse, but Sir John Vanbrugh, Mr. William Congreve, and all those other celebrated gentlemen of mirth have yet to give me an entertainment I enjoyed half so much as this. There was something so utterly delightful in the idea of Corporal Joseph Flickers being my papa, and his conception of a parent's duties in that case, that I had perforce to stuff my cloak into my mouth to prevent my laughter disturbing my denouncer.

Next moment, though, there was scanty cause for mirth. The Corporal, having delivered this tremendous speech with a raucous eloquence, gave it as his opinion that the prisoner had already been let into the house with my connivance, and that I had put him in hiding there. They were unanimous in this, and came to the conclusion that he would abide some

hours there at least, as he had been so sternly chased that he could not crawl another mile. This was true enough, as their quarry took occasion to whisper as they said so. It was considered inadvisable to challenge the house just then; the majority of its inmates being abed, the night not yet lifted, and therefore favouring concealment, and above all they were full of weariness themselves, and their horses beaten. Accordingly they determined to put them up, and also to allow their own weariness a few hours of much-needed ease.

"Even us, the mob, the scum, can't go on for ever; what do you say, John Pensioner?" the Corporal remarked.

"Truest word you've spoke this moon, Joe," John Pensioner asserted, with a yawn for testimony.

"Where'll we sleep though, Corp'ral?" inquires my friend, Mr. George.

"There's a hayloft top o' this," the Corporal replied, "pretty snug wi' straw and fodder. Roomy, too; bed six like blazes. And warm, warm as that 'ere hussy of a ladyship will be in the other life, when the devil gives her pep'mint but no canary wine."

"The very spot!" by general acclamation.

I could have cried out in my rage. This meant simply that we must be taken like a brace of pheasants in a snare. With the soldiers already established underneath there did not appear the remotest possibility of escape.

"The game's up, madam," the poor prisoner whispered to me, while I whispered curtly back again that I'd be better suited if he'd hold his tongue.

"But you, my dear lady, you?" says he, heedless of my sharp reply, "'twill never do for you to be discovered with me thus. Nay, you shall not. Rat me, but I have a plan! They are still underneath this trap, you see, assembled in a talk. I'll drop down in their midst, scuffle with 'em, and while we are thus engaged, you can get from here into the yard, and slip back to the house unseen, and so leave them none the wiser."

"Very pretty," says I, "but how am I to get from here into the yard? It means a ten-feet drop upon weak ankles, for the ladder, you observe, is no longer there."

"Confound it!" says he. "I'd forgot the ladder. Of course it is not there. What a fool I am! But 'oons! here's a means to overcome it, madam. We'll drop a truss of straw down, and that will break your fall if you leap upon it carefully."

"I'm to run away, then, while you, my lad, are to be delivered up to death?"

"Perhaps," he dubiously said; "but then I am the least to be considered."

"Then I intend to do nothing of the sort," says I. "'Tis like man's vanity to cast himself for the part of hero. But I think I can strut through that part just as handsomely as you."

"You have your reputation, madam, to consider," hereminded me. "They surely must not find you here."

"A fig for reputation and her dowager proprieties. Am I not a law unto myself?"

This was a simulated flippancy, however, for we were in a grievous situation now. But the des-

peration of it spurred me, and very soon I found a plan by which the fugitive might after all go free. It called for a pretty daring act, and much kind fortune in its execution. Adventure nothing, nothing win, is however the device by which I am only too prone to order my behaviour. For even granting that your effort fails, the excitement it engenders is something of a compensation.

Briefly my stratagem was this. I would exchange cloaks with the rebel, muffling my form up thoroughly in his military article, and don his three-cornered hat in lieu of the hood I wore. Thus arrayed, 'twas not too much to think that when his enemies caught a view of me in the uncertain moonlight, and expecting to see the prisoner there and at that season, they would mistake me for him. In an undertone that admitted of no parley I caused the prisoner to effect this alteration in his attire, and having done so speedily, I gave him further of my plan.

"My lad," says I, "let us drop that truss of straw down, as you said, but we must take care that none of them see us do so. I am then to fall upon it, and having done so safely, shall contrive to advertise them of the fact. And when they run forth to seize me I shall flee hot foot across the park. They will, of course, pursue. Then, sir, will be your time. While we are having our diversion in the grass, the path will be open for your flight into the house. You will find one of the kitchen bolts unslipped, and on my return I shall expect to then discover you awaiting further orders."

"'Tis a sweet invention, madam," he replied, "but

how shall you fare when they catch you and your identity is known?"

"The chances are," I answered stoutly, "that they will not catch me. A thick wood infringes on the path a quarter of a mile away. If I once reach that, and I think I can, for these men are dog-weary and I shall have a start of them, I'll wager that I am not ta'en. For I could traverse every inch of that wood in the darkest night."

The rebel was exceedingly loth to let me do this. But the more I pondered the idea, the more I became enamoured of it; small the danger, the exertion not excessive, the prospect of success considerable, the promise of diversion great. There was all to win and nought to lose, I told him. Besides, in the end I did not condescend to argue, but simply set my foot down and led him to understand that when Bab Gossiter had made her mind up no mortal man could say her nay.

Therefore he submitted, with a degree of reluctance, of course; yet none the less did he obey me to the letter. First we peered down through the trap to see what our enemies were at. They were succouring their horses. This being a three-stall stable only, three of their steeds had to be elsewhere furnished. The Corporal, John Pensioner, and another soldier, had led their animals into the one we occupied, whilst the others had taken theirs to the one adjoining. Choosing a moment when all the men were in the stables the prisoner dropped a truss of straw down gently ten feet to the stones. Then we listened painfully to learn if this movement had been discerned

oy those within. Seemingly they were all unconscious of it, for they went on uninterruptedly in the bedding of their horses. Therefore the moment was still propitious, and I ventured my descent. Quickly I stepped to the edge of the loft, got through the wide bars that enclosed the provender, dropped upon my knees, tightly grasped my companion's outstretched hands, swayed an instant above the space that intervened between me and the straw, was lowered several inches nearer to the ground by virtue of the rebel's offices, then renounced my grasp of him and leapt lightly on to the cushion that awaited me beneath. The shock of the fall was of the slightest, and left me ready for an immediate flight. This was truly fortunate, as it was evident that my descent had been duly noted by the Corporal and his men. Hearing a commotion in the stable and various astonished cries, I began to run at once, and was, perhaps, the best part of a hundred yards away ere they came fuming and shouting from the stables and were at last alive to my retreat.

"The horses, men, the horses!" bawled the Corporal, never doubting that it was the prisoner in full flight.

To lead forth their weary beasts, to saddle them, and to coax them to pursuit meant such a loss of time that I was far out in the middle of the park ere they had started on their way. I headed straight for the gaunt, shadowy line of woods that looked the veritable haunt of ghosts and the supernatural with their deep, dark masses of tree and foliage bathed in the eeriness of snow and moonlight. It always was

my pride that, though a woman of the mode, I could, when in the country, run both easily and lightly, being blessed with the nimblest feet and a stride which, if not an athlete's, had at least a spring and quickness in it not to be despised.

Further, it was easy running across the soft, thin carpet of the snow, whilst the flakes had ceased to fall, and the bitter wind was dead. I was soon aware, however, that it was to be the sternest race. Once mounted and away, the hunters decreased the wide distance that was between us mighty soon. And presently I knew that my long start would prove not a yard too much to enable me to reach the woods. In a little while, being in no state for such violent and prolonged exertion, my chest became restricted and my breath grew dreadfully distressed. And every minute my pursuers drew more near. Therefore, despite my discomforts, I set my teeth and trotted on as determinedly as ever; and I would have you to believe that I felt a fierce delight in doing so, for after long months of a suppressed and artificial course of life, this strange race in the snow seemed a return to very nature. Sure, this tense, exhilarating agony of hope and fear and hot-breathing energy were worth a hundred triumphs in the drawing-room!

Yard by yard the horses ran me down. But I had fixed my eyes upon those weird trees ahead, that assumed shapes more palpable and familiar as I ran; and though I could hear the perpetual shoutings and hoof-thuds of my enemies, I never once looked back, but trotted valiantly on with a mind for nothing but the woods. There was no time then to enjoy the

quaintness of the matter, or to laugh at my ridiculous employ. However, that lack hath been made up later. Soon I was so near the trees that I could plainly see the ditch I had to cross, and the very gap the hither side it in the fence that I proposed to scramble through. The proximity of safety lent me strength, and for a few yards my failing pace was perceptibly improved.

Here I had a horrid fright. My feet were almost on those dim, mysterious woods, the snow upon them pure, the moon upon them eerie, and such a mighty silence in the trees that if a squirrel cracked a beech twig the report of it rang among them like a gun, when a pistol barked out loud and brutally, and a bullet whistled by my ear and pattered ominously in the ditch. 'Twas a very cruel, peremptory means, I thought, and my heart stood still with terror. Not my feet, forsooth, for fear was a sharp spur to their flagging ardour. I durst not look behind, but the shot informed me that, despite the perilous nearness of my pursuers, they saw that I must be the first within the wood, where horses could not follow, and among that continent of branch and herbage they knew that their search must prove most difficult. Evidently they meant to stay my entrance, cost what it may.

Another shot yelped out at me, another, and then another. One touched my hat, I think, but that was all. Verily the devil was wonderfully kind this morning.

And strange as you may think it, I felt pretty callous to these bullets. Nay, I was not afraid of anything. My spirit had thrown for once the fetters of convention off. It was itself for one brief hour. It was part of

the earth and the trees, the snow and the moonlight ; free as air and primitive as nature. 'Twas running unimpeded under God's moon, without any of our eighteenth-century fopperies of brocades and powders on it.

I scrambled through the ditch and out again, brushed through the hedge-gap at the cost of cloak rents and a briar in my hand, and found myself within the thicket. I plunged into the deepest I could find, but as I did so a new volley rattled above my head among the trees, and the splinters from a shattered bough missed my face by inches and fell across the path. Knowing the ground so thoroughly I could take a great advantage of it, and sure every bit of it was needed, for the soldiers were desperately close. There was so thick a roof of branches to this wood that the moon could hardly penetrate, and not the snow at all. Thus the question of footprints had not to be encountered, and the deep gloom that slumbered everywhere also lent me aid. Once under the protection of the trees I checked my pace, for in this sanctuary it would be easy to dodge a whole battalion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WOODS.

I HAD soon breasted through the trees to the side of a dark runnel that darted through the glade. Arrived there I felt that my enemies were nonplussed, as I had come by a devious and mazy way of which they must certainly be ignorant. Surely I could breathe at last, and when I stopped beside the stream to recover myself a little, my success seemed so complete, and I had played such a pretty trick upon my friend the Corporal withal, that I was quite complacent at the thought and felt a disposition to celebrate this triumph in a new sphere in a fashion that should startle 'em. Now it must have been the action of the freakish moon upon my giddy head or the magic of the woods, or a strain of wild music in the stream, for somehow as I stood there in that perishing cold night listening to the solemn river and my enemies calling through the stern stillness of the trees, all the wantonness of my spirit was let loose. The sharp frost made my blood thrill; my heart expanded to the pale loveliness of the sleeping earth. This was life. This was spacious air, and the pride of freedom. In this oppressive eighteenth century of ours, with its slaveries of rank and fashion, one must go into a wood of moonlight in the middle of the

night for one's pulses to pipe to the natural joys of unrestraint. At least I thought so then, and in the exuberance of the moment I concocted a merry plot for the diversion of myself and the mystification of the Corporal and his men. Nor was it made of mischief merely, since it was to be ordered in such a cunning way that it should still further throw them off the rebel's track, and confirm their theory that they had already seen him in this wood.

First I returned upon the road I had come by and spied out where they were. This was a matter of small difficulty, as their voices were plainly to be distinguished close at hand.

Creeping through the thickets at the direction of their tones, I came at last to a place where a rift among the tree tops let the brightness in. It poured upon the Corporal and his men, assembled in still another consultation underneath a glorious silver-birch, arch and lissome as a maid, which rose above them with graces indescribable, and seemed from where I stood to fade into the sky. Clearly my pursuers were seriously at fault, and even dubious of the road to take in this strange wilderness. 'Twas in my mind to minister to this perplexity.

Selecting a spot appropriate to the purpose, I cheerfully set about preparing them the surprise I had in store. I crushed my soft, three-cornered hat into a pocket in my cloak, unbound my hair, and let its whole dark luxury shine with moonlight to my waist. This in itself I considered sufficient to destroy all resemblance between the figure I intended to present, and the fugitive they had so

lately chased across the park, and as all of them must be extremely ill-acquainted with the features of my Lady Barbara, having only beheld them for an instant the previous night, 'twas not at all likely that they would be recognised just now. This done I crept some distance up the glade, and as I did so took occasion to recall the weirdest melody I knew, which partook of the nature of a chant, wedded the absurdest doggerel to it, though it must not be denied the merit of being a kind of interpretation of my abandoned fancy, and lifted my voice up loud and shrilly in a song. Having fallen after the first bar or two into a proper strain, I warmed to the wanton mirth of it and plunged my spirit completely in its whim.

I tripped from my concealment in the glade into an open avenue leading to a spot in which the soldiers stood in council. Full before their astounded eyes, I came dancing down the moonlight singing :

“ This world it is not weary,
Though my life is very long ;
For I'm the child of faery,
And my heart it is a song.
My house it is the starlight,
My form is light as air,
As out upon a bright night,
I issue from my lair ;
And riding on a moonbeam,
I come to realms of men ;
Yet when I see the day gleam,
I then go back again.”

I never saw six grown men affected so profoundly. One broke into a howl, not unlike a dog's when his

tail hath been trod on suddenly, wheeled about and fled precipitately hence. Two others locked themselves in one another's arms, and turned away their eyes in the anguish of their fright; whilst the remainder seemed struck entirely stupid, fell back against the tree trunk, and being unable to believe their eyes, opened their mouths as widely as their orbs, probably to lend some assistance to their vision.

As for me, you may be sure I was delighted highly by this flattering reception. And I do not doubt that I made a most unearthly figure with masses of hair streaming wild on my shoulders, my eyes wide-staring, and my feet tripping a fantastic measure to the shrill chant issuing from my lips:

"I ever choose the woodland,
For here the wild birds are,
And I'm a sister to them,
Though my home it is a star."

Thus I sang as I danced down the glade waving my hands above my head in a kind of unholy glee at the weird music that I made. I halted opposite these tremblers, and set up a ridiculous scream of mockery. Then I looked upon them with great eyes of wonder, and then again began to dance and sing:

"A blackbird is my brother,
I see him in that tree,
A skylark is my lover;
But I prefer a bee."

While I was in the middle of this arrant nonsense, my good friend Flickers, who was paler than a ghost,

hung on to his pistol with tenacity, for that piece of iron held all the little courage that he had. I could see the perspiration shining on his face, as he muttered in a voice that trembled like the ague :

"What you are I don't know. But if you're woman or if you're fiend, come a step nearer and I'll—I'll shoot you !"

He pointed the pistol, but the muzzle tottered so that he could not have hit a tree.

"Ha ! ha ! ha !" I laughed in my throat in a voice that was sepulchral, then danced before them once again and began to sing :

"Water cannot quench me,
And fire cannot burn ;
Pray, how will you slay me ?
That have I yet to learn."

The effect of this was to cause the pistol to drop on to the grass from his nerveless hand.

"Go—go 'way !" he stuttered ; "go 'way, you—you witch !"

Whereupon I broke out in reply :

"He says I am a night-witch,
But this I do deny ;
For I'm a child of faery,
And my house it is the sky."

Mr. Flickers said no more. 'Twas not surprising, either. I much question whether any human creature could have conversationally shone in that moonlit wood just then. Those simple soldiers, shown on a solemn background of gloom and mighty trees, were

sufficient in that eerie light to shatter the nerves of a person of the strongest mind should he come upon them suddenly. What must I have been, then? And these victims being very little encumbered with their education had, therefore, the less restriction imposed upon their ignorant fancies. 'Twas quite certain that I was either a witch or a rather superior sort of devil, as, of course, the popular conception of fiends is not by any means so beautiful.

I did not venture any nearer to them than I need, lest they should discover too many evidences in me of the very clay of which they were themselves composed.

"Behold in me," cried I, in prose, but with that impressive grandeur that belongs to the queens of tragedy, "behold in me the Spirit of the Woods. And he who heeds me not shall be surely lost."

Prose even upon these primitive minds seemed to lack the natural magic that is in poetry. For now 'twas that they began to recover somewhat of their courage. But by a master stroke I proved to them that I had a supernatural quality—that of divination, if you please.

"You seek a prisoner," says I, "who escaped from a stable yesterday. His name is Dare, and he hath passed this way."

Without a doubt my prestige was increased by the singular knowledge here displayed. I could see their astounded faces asking of one another: How can this wild creature, this witch, this Spirit of the Woods, know all this unless she is even as she says, a

supernatural? Let us heed her every word, for surely she can tell us much.

Faith, it was much I told them! I told them I would be their friend, and that if they would follow my directions they should learn the way the prisoner went.

You must understand that the voice I used was one that until that hour had never been heard on earth; that my long cloak and flowing hair held awful possibilities; that I stood where the moon was brightest; that my eyes were very wild; that my face was wondrous beautiful, but weird; that I was possessed of the unnatural power of divination; while my conduct and whole appearance were the most fantastic ever seen. Therefore when I pointed out to them the exact direction of the rebel's flight, which I had better state was precisely opposite to the one I proposed to embrace myself, they accepted it without a question and eagerly took this road, mighty glad, I think, to be relieved of my presence on such gentle terms.

Watching them recede from sight, I then quickly knotted and tucked my hair up under my hat, and then set off for the house without once tarrying. I made a slight detour to the left to approach it from the further side, and so prevent the least risk of encountering my enemies on the journey. Speed was quite as imperative now as formerly, for the rebel should be awaiting me in the kitchen, and at the mercy of the first person of the household who might chance to see him there. Fortunately, the hour, as far as I could judge, was considerably short of five

o'clock; and in the winter time the domestics were not abroad till six. Gliding through the trees and across the snowy grass, I was standing at the kitchen door in less than half-an-hour. Entering with stealth, I had no sooner closed the door behind me than I was arrested by the light hand of the rebel on my sleeve.

"They are fooled, my lad," says I, my triumph irrepressible, "fooled as six men never were before. And now, sir, I think that we shall save you."

"Madam," says he, with a boyish directness that seemed charming, "oh, what a genius you have! But I cannot thank you now, I am too dead weary. And where am I to hide?"

"If you will slip your shoes off and carry 'em in your hand," says I, "I will lead you to my chamber, and once there you shall sleep the clock round if you have the disposition."

"And you," says he, "are you not weary?"

"Not I," I answered. "I am never weary of adventures. Besides, I have much to do ere you can be snugly hid."

An instant later I had guided him through the darkness and the maze of passages in deep silence to my bedroom, this being the most secret chamber I could devise for his reception. Only Mrs. Polly Emblem was ever likely to intrude upon its privacy. Wherefore I led him there and permitted him to fling his worn-out frame upon my couch.

Discarding the cloak and hat of his I wore, I wrapped a warm rug about him, gave him a cordial, and bade him get himself to sleep. Then I turned

the key upon him and repaired to the chamber of my maid.

I entered without disturbing her, for she always was a wonderful good sleeper at the hour she ought to be awake preparing a dish of chocolate for her mistress. I kindled her candle with the extreme of difficulty, for my hands were numbed so badly that for the present they had no virtue in them. Even the light did not arouse the comfortable Mrs. Polly, but when I laid my icy fingers on her warm cheek they worked on her like magic. She would have shrieked only I held my other hand across her mouth.

"Do you see the time?" says I; "three minutes after five. But hush! not a word, my girl, as you love your life, for there's a strange man got into the house."

The foolish creature shook with fright.

"He is in my chamber," I added, with an air of tragedy.

"Oh, my lady!" says the maid.

There was too little time to plague her, though, which was perhaps as well, for I was in a mood that might have caused her to take an early departure from her wits. Instead of that, however, I told the story of the night with all the detail that was necessary. When I had done, the silly but delightful thing looked at me in a kind of holy wonder.

"Oh, your la'ship!" says she, in tones of very tolerable ecstasy. "What a heart you've got! What an angel's disposition!"

"No, my silly girl," says I, though not displeased to hear her say so. "I happen to have neither. An

infernal deal of naughtiness is all that my character contains. A stranger sleeping in my chamber ! Besides, you know you flatter me. For if no man is a hero to his valet, how possibly can a woman be an angel to her maid ? ”

To prove the soundness of this argument I grasped Mrs. Polly's ear, pinched it pretty badly, and asked her what she thought of my divinity ?

She was soon into her clothes though, and had a fire lit ; while I made haste to pull my shoes and stockings off, their condition was so horrid, and exchanged them for some dry ones, then set about warming my hands and toes, for they were causing me to grin with the fierce hot-ache that was in them. Having at last put my own person into a more comfortable state, and that of the rebel into some security, I took counsel of Mrs. Polly on the problem of his ultimate escape.

She was the only creature I could possibly confide in at this moment. And as she was the staunchest, faithfulest of souls I had no hesitation. Presently some of my clothes and toilet necessities had to be procured. It was unfortunate that they were in my dressing-room, and that the only entrance to it was through my chamber. However, taking Emblem with me, I went to fetch them out.

Unlocking the door with care, we entered softly that we might not disturb the sleeper, for God knew how much there lay before him ! I had Emblem pull the blinds up against the daylight, for should any person look upon my window from the lawn at noon 'twould astonish them to see it veiled. We soon took the

requisite articles from the dressing-room, relocked the chamber door, and returned to whence we came. But ere this was done, I held the candle near the sleeper's face. 'Twas to relieve the curiosity of Emblem, you understand; she was pining to see what the fugitive's countenance was like.

He made the most sweetly piteous picture. He lay huddled among snow-white sheets of linen, and a counterpane of silk, in his tattered, muddy suit of coarse prunella, which left many soils upon its delicate surroundings. His cheek was pale and lean as death. Where the gyves had pinched his wrists they had left them raw; and I was startled at the thinness of his body, for it appeared to have no more flesh upon it than a rat. In sooth he looked the very poorest beggar that ever slept on straw, and no more in harmony with his present situation than was Mr. Christophero Sly in like circumstances. Yet as I looked at him there seemed something so tender and so strong about his meagreness that I pushed back the hair upon his forehead with light fingers in an absent manner, and just as lightly and just as absently did touch it with my lips. No sooner had I done this than I drew them back, and turned my face abruptly round to Emblem as though it had been stung. I had forgotten Emblem!

But I saw that the maid was blushing for me very deeply, though she strove with excellent intention to look quite unconscious of my conduct. Yet I coldly stared her out of countenance.

"Girl," says I, severely, "the queen can do no wrong. She may box the ears of gartered dukes, or

kiss the brows of sleeping bakers' boys. But only the queen, you understand." And I shot out such a look at her that she led the way to her chamber without a single word.

I appeared at breakfast in high feather, but with rather more complexion than I usually wear so early in the day. But a woman cannot go prowling over fields of snow and moonlight at dreadful hours of morning without a tale being told. Cosmetics, though, have a genius for secrets.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE HERO IS FOUND TO BE A PERSON OF
NO DESCENT WHATEVER.

AT ten o'clock the soldiers came and reported themselves to their commander. One of them, presumably the officer in charge, was closeted with the Captain in the library for no less a time than an hour and a quarter. The others meantime put their jaded horses up, procured some food, and retired to rest themselves. At a few minutes to twelve o'clock, as the Mountain could not go to Mahomet, owing to some question of his knee, Mahomet went to the Mountain. At that hour a spy posted on the stairs informed me that my papa, the Earl, hopped—gout and all—to the Captain in the library. Meantime Emblem and myself were discussing the situation, behind locked doors, exhaustively, but with a deal of trepidation. She, it seemed, had just come into the possession of a piece of news of a very alarming kind. It was to the effect that the Captain, not wishing to disturb his knee, had passed the night in his chair in front of the library fire. And that apartment opened in the entrance hall, and was near the very flight of stairs up which the prisoner had passed. It was thus all too probable that he had heard incriminating noises towards the hour of four.

"Emblem," says I, "that man is the devil. At every turn he pops up to thwart us."

And before that day was out I was moved to speak of him in even stronger terms. At present, what to do with the prisoner was our chief concern. He must be smuggled away that night, if possible; but the situation was desperately complex. First, he must be provided with a horse, and then with money, not to mention an open road, and a suitable disguise. 'Twould be no kindness whatever — indeed, would merely be sending him to his doom—to despatch him a fugitive to the open moors again in the middle of the night unless he were provided with the amplest resources for escape.

Yet, while I speculated on the pros and cons of his position, and the skilfullest means of aiding him, a thought that was never absent long caught me painfully in the breast. What of my papa, the Earl? If the prisoner were not retaken in a week, that dear old gentleman would make acquaintance with the Tower. I was in a truly horrid case. The fugitive was in my hands; a word to his Majesty of the shattered knee, and the Earl, my papa, was safe. But having gone so far, how could I deliver that child over to his enemies? His lean, white look had made too direct a claim upon my kindness. His youth, his sad condition, his misfortunes had made me very much his friend. Had he not confided to me the custody of his life? And must I repay the trust reposed in me by betraying him to his foes? It appeared that my vaunted heartlessness had deserted me when needed most. I was involved in this hard

problem, and casting contumely on Mrs. Polly because she could not suggest any kind of solution to it, when a knock upon the door disturbed our council. Emblem rose, unlocked the door, and admitted little Pettigrew the page. He was the spy who had been posted on the stairs, also at the key-hole of the library door at favourable intervals. The information that he brought completely terrified us both.

I dismissed him as soon as it was given, for it was not wise that he should glean too much.

"Emblem," says I, on Pettigrew's departure, "that settles it. That leaves absolutely nothing to be done. I wish that Captain was at the bottom of the sea!"

For the result of the interview between the Captain and the Earl was this: the house was about to be searched from the bottom to the top, and every room and cupboard was to be overhauled, since the Captain, having taken the evidence of his men, and having heard strange sounds in the night himself, had put two and two together and was now heavily suspecting me. My papa was not loth to do so either, and at the suggestion of the soldier, had issued strict instructions that no person under any pretext whatever was to leave the house until a thorough examination had been made.

The prisoner was as good as lost. There was not a place anywhere in which a man could be concealed. Emblem proposed between a bed and mattress, but I scouted that as not sufficiently ingenious. I suggested a clothes chest for a hiding-place, but Emblem was not slow to advance a similar objection.

"Well," says I, "it is a matter for the lad himself. We will bear this hard news to him and see what his own wits are worth."

Accordingly we repaired together to the chamber in which he was still asleep. There was yet an hour or two before us in which to act, as the soldiers were at present indulging in their earned repose. A couple of shakes upon the shoulder and the rebel was rubbing his eyes and looking at us. By the utter bewilderment of his face he had evidently lost all cognisance of where he was, and I could not refrain from laughter as he gazed from me to Emblem, from Emblem to his luxurious couch, and then back again to me.

"Mr. Christophero Sly," says I, "how doth your lordship find yourself?"

"Good Madam Wife," says he, "I find myself blithe as a pea, I thank you."

This reply was evidence of three things. First, that my voice had recalled him to his present state; second, that his deep sleep had restored him wonderfully; third, that he was no fool. The third was the most pleasing to me. He had now slipped from the bed, and was standing in his stocking feet before us with a degree of humility and pride that looked mightily becoming.

"Madam," he says, with a boy's simplicity, which was a great contrast to what I had been used to, "I shall not try to thank you, because I'm not good at words. But wait, madam, only wait, and you shall not lack for gratitude."

It was most amusing to witness this frail and

tender lad go striding up and down the chamber, looking fierce as any giant-killer. The vanity of boys is a very fearful thing.

"I am afraid I shall, poor Master Jack," says I next moment in a falling voice, "for I am here to tell you that the soldiers are in this house; that as soon as they have taken a little rest they will search it from the bottom to the top, and leave not a stick unturned; and that as matters stand there is not a power on earth that now can save you."

He took this cruel news with both fortitude and courage.

"Well, then, madam," says he, walking up and down the room again, but this time with his face unpleasant, "if it is not to be that I shall give you gratitude, at least I think I can show you what a good death is. For at the worst it will be a better one than Tyburn Tree."

"Then you are not afraid of death?" I asked.

I thought I saw his white face grow more pallid at the question, but his answer was: "No! oh no! At least—do you suppose, madam, that I would tell you if I were?"

This was charming candour, and I laughed outright at it, and said: "I never saw the boy that was afraid of anything whatever."

"I am not a boy," he answered proudly.

"You have vanity enough for three, sir; but ere you perish, boy, there is one thing I must learn. Captain Grantley gives me to understand that you are the son of a baker. Is that so? For I think you are far too delightful to be anything so plebeian."

"Ah, no!" he sighed, "not even that. I never was the son of anybody."

"Dear me!" says I, "how singular! I must assume then that you came upon this earth like manna from the skies?"

"When I was a fortnight old," says he, "I was left upon the doorstep of a priory. I have never seen my parents, and I do not even know their names."

"But you are called Anthony Dare!" says I.

"The fathers called me Anthony after their patron saint; they called me Dare, for daring to howl upon the doorstep of a priory."

"They have given you the most appropriate name they could possibly have found," says I, in admiration of his open, candid face and his courageous eyes, "for if I read your countenance aright, my lad, you dare do anything whatever."

"I think I dare," says he, and tightened his thin lips.

"Then if you think you dare, you had better kiss me," says I, haughtily.

'Twas the tone I had withered princes with. I drew up all my inches, and I am not a little woman; I set back my head; I put a regal lift into my chin; I looked upon him from a snow-capped altitude; and again and again my eyes did strike him with disdain. I did not think the man was made who could have kissed me then. For 'twas not an invitation, you understand; it was a flat defiance.

He sent a look at me, and then recoiled with something of a shiver. He sent another and fell

into a kind of trembling, and I could see that fear of me was springing in his eyes. My will was matched against his own; and it was now a case of mastery. But 'twas his that did prevail. A third time he came with his fiery look; I quailed before it, and next instant his lips had known my cheek.

"My lad," says I, and I was shaking like a leaf, "I think you are formed for greatness. Do you know that there is not another man in England who could have dared that deed!"

'And strike me pale," says he, "don't ask me to dare it any more. I much prefer the whipping-post."

And whiter than before he sat upon the bed in a condition pretty much the equal of my own.

"What, you've known the whipping-post?" I cried. "What adventures you have had! And brought up in a priory. Now tell me all about 'em."

"Three times to the whipping-post," says he, "twice to the pillory, twice to Edinburgh Tolbooth, and once a broken leg, and various embroilments, and strange accidents by sea and land."

"Oh! my lad," says I, "if we had but time, what would I not give to hear your life recited. But the whipping-post? What's it like? Do you know, I've been nearly tempted there myself, for it must be a very unique sensation."

"It is somewhat like kissing you, madam, only nothing like so painful." This incorrigible rogue said this with the sobriety of a cardinal.

"And now," says he, "I won't tell you one other solitary thing till you have appeased my hunger. I am famishing."

"What!" says I, "you who are to die in half an hour requiring a meal!"

I was astonished that the imminence of death did not affect him. But then I had no need to be, for there was scarce a trait in his strange character that did not pass quite outside of my experience.

"Now tell me more about your life," says I, "you charming young adventurer."

His answer was a droll expression; and he shook his head and placed a finger on his lips to remind me of his vow of silence. And he would not speak another word of any kind until I had sent Emblem to smuggle up some food and to enquire whether the soldiers had yet begun their search.

When she had gone, I said: "Suppose, my lad, you proved, after all, to be a person of high consideration, deserted by your parents for State reasons or matters of that sort. We read of such things in the story-books, you know."

"Not I," says he, with his delicious gravity. "I know quite well I am not that. I am a person of low tastes."

Here he sighed.

"They might be the fruits of your education," says I tenaciously, for I love aught that seems at all romantic or mysterious. "Let me hear them, sir, for I believe I am well fitted to pronounce a verdict thereupon."

"For one thing," says he, "I am fond of cheese."

"How barbarous!" says I.

"And I prefer to drink from pewter."

"'Tis a survival of the Vandal and the Goth," says I.

"And velvet frets me. I cannot bow; I cannot pirouette; I cannot make a leg; and I have no gift of compliment."

"Mr. Dare, says I, "you are indeed a waif, and not a high-born gentleman. Mr. Dare, your case is hopeless."

But so heavy a decision sat upon him in the lightest manner, for he heard the feet of the approaching Emblem and the rattle of dishes on a tray. She, too, had evidently formed a low opinion of his tastes, for she had brought him the rudest pigeon-pie and the vulgarest pot of ale you ever saw.

"I hope, my wench," says I sharply, "you let no one in the kitchen see you procure these things. They will say I have a diabetes else."

"'Deed, no, my lady," she replied; and then in a confidential whisper, "the soldiers are not yet begun their search. I have had a word with Corporal Flickers, who is on duty. He hath told me privily that by the Captain's orders their investigation is to be postponed till four o'clock, as they are in such urgent need of food and sleep."

"And what gave you Corporal Flickers for this news?" says I, frowning at her.

Emblem puckered up her lips and looked puritanically prim.

"Only a look," says she demurely, "and a very indifferent imitation of one of your own, ma'am."

Meantime the condemned rebel had swallowed half

the pigeon-pie and drunk a pint of ale. I watched him in polite surprise, and the thought came to me that if his fighting was as fierce as was his appetite, six men would be none too many to retake him. Having at last dispatched his meal, he said:

"Madam, do you know that I feel quite wonderfully better? Fit for stratagems and devilry, in fact. And, lord knows, they'll be required."

"They will indeed," says I. "But stratagems—you talk of stratagems, now let me think of 'em."

I seldom lack for a certain fertility in inventions. I began to put it to the test. To sit tamely down and watch this fine lad perish was by no means what I was prepared to do. Having pledged myself so deeply to his affair, I would see him through with it.

"Madam," he broke in on my thoughts, "two feet of straight and honest steel is worth a mile of stratagy. Give me a sword, and bother your head no more about me."

"'Tis bloodymindedness," says I; "and you such a tender, handsome boy!"

"I am not tender; I am not handsome; I am not a boy," says he.

"You are the very handsomest lad I ever saw," says I, mischievously, "and Mrs. Polly Emblem knows it also. She looks on you as sweetly as though you were a corporal."

"Bah!" he cries, "do you suppose, madam, that I will let a parcel of women pet me like a terrier pup. I was born for better things, I hope."

"For the whipping post, the pillory, the Tolbooth, you saucy rogue," says I, laughing at his anger,

and the way he treated one of the foremost ladies in the State. "But you know you are very handsome, now," says I, in a very coaxing manner.

"To be handsome," he replied, "a man must be six feet high; splendid wide shoulders; slender hips, and muscles made of steel. No, I am not handsome. I am only a little fellow; five feet five inches is my height; my frame hath no more consistency than your own. See how my shoulders slope, and my very voice is thin and feminine."

"Why certainly it is," says I, "but still you are very handsome."

"'Tis untrue," says he, determined to prevail and doing so, for he was of that disposition that whatever he wished he obtained, and whatever he undertook he performed; "but, madam, if it will be a satisfaction to you, I may say, that for my size I possess an arm that merits your attention. Observe these muscles, madam. They are flexible."

And I laughed aloud, when he pushed his sleeve up suddenly and laid his forearm bare. He bent it and made its fibres rise, and before he would be content I had to grip it with an appearance of great interest.

But the catalogue of his dimensions and his feminine resemblance was to put me in possession of one of the bravest stratagems that ever was conceived.

"I have it!" I exclaimed, in a tone of victory. "I have it! I have discovered a device that shall fit you like a glove."

"I do not want a device," says he; "give me an

honest sword, and a sturdy courage. They are worth all your pussy-cat tricks."

"You have a feminine exterior," says I, "and I possess the clothes and the arts that can adorn it. In half an hour you shall become a most ravishing girl."

"I will not, by thunder!" he exclaimed, with gleams of purple in his face. "I will go to Tyburn rather."

"Well, think about it," says I, coaxingly, "and remember this is your only chance of life. I do believe that I may save you thus. Besides, a boy of your height will make a very fine, tall woman."

This it was that moved him to the scheme. In a moment was he reconciled.

"Tall!" cries he. "Well, its worth trying anyhow. And at least there's room in a woman's what-do-you-call-'ems to stow a pistol and a bit of ammunition?"

I assured him that there was.

Thereupon Emblem and I set about at once to prepare him this disguise. The more I considered it, the more positive did I grow of its success. Our present mode seemed to have been invented to assist our audacious plan. Every lady of pretension must have her powder, her patch, and her great head-dress. The hooped skirt was then the fashion too. I placed the most elegant one I had at his disposal. That is to say, the biggest, for the larger they were the more "tonnish" they were considered. Indeed, the petticoat I procured him was of such capacity that it fitted over his masculine clothes with ease, and abolished the necessity for under-

linen, as his shirt and breeches fulfilled its duties admirably. We got him into this rich silk dress, with convolvuli and mignonette brocaded on it, in the shortest space of time. The bodice, though, was a different affair. He had to remove his coat and vest ere we might venture to put it on at all. Then he had to be dragged into it by main force, till it seemed that a miracle alone had saved the seams from bursting.

"Huh!" he sighed, "I cannot breathe. This is less humane than hanging."

"But not so ignominious," says I.

"Well, I wouldn't be too sure of that," says he. "For surely 'tis of the very depth of degradation for a lusty man like me to be put in petticoats, and made a woman of."

"Wretch!" says I. Mrs. Polly Emblem, being employed at that moment in pinning a gold brooch into the collar of his bodice, by misadventure stuck it cleverly in his throat.

We made him a bust with a pad of wool. His hair was a matter for nice consideration. He wore it long, and of a yellow colour; and, although of a coarse male quality, it was profuse enough to occupy his shoulders. Emblem, however, was a past mistress in the manipulation of a head-dress. It shook me with laughter, yet thrilled me with pleasure too, to witness the degree of mastery with which she seized that ungovernable mane, that was no more curly than is a grey rat's tail, and twisted it to her own devices. She packed it up with pins and divers arts known only to the coiffeuse,

enclosed it in one of my commodoes, and made the whole of such a height and imperial proportion that even I would not have disdained to wear it publicly.

There now remained the question of his tell-tale hands and feet. But the difficulties they presented were very well got over. His form being cast in so slight a mould, it was not strange that they were of quite a delicate character; and when a pair of long mittens had been stretched across his hands to hide their natural roughness, there remained small chance of detection on their account.

But his feet were a somewhat more serious affair. My own shoes were outside the question utterly. When Emblem mischievously produced a pair, and suggested that he should try them on, his face was worthy of remark.

"What, those!" says he. "I might have tugged 'em on when I was four weeks old, but I'll swear at no time thereafter."

Emblem then produced a pair of hers. They fared but slightly better, she being a very dainty creature, a fact of which she was very well aware. Thereupon she repaired below-stairs to discover if any of the maids could lend assistance. In the end she returned in triumph with a not inelegant pair the cook went to church on Sundays in. She being one of the most buxom members of her tribe, they promised well.

It was a squeeze, but the lad found a way inside them, and walked presently across the room to allow us to judge of the general effect.

"A little more rose-pink upon his cheeks," says I, "a rather darker eyebrow, a higher frill about his throat, a deeper shade of vermilion on his lips, two inches more ascension in his bust, and we shall have the rogue a rival to myself."

Emblem, most enthusiastic in the cause, brimful of mirth, and with a pardonable vanity in her own accomplished hand, worked out these details to a miracle. A touch or two and Venus was superseded.

He looked into the mirror and saw his image there, and kissed the glass to show how deeply the picture there presented had wrought upon his susceptibilities.

"A deuced fine girl!" says he. "Faith! I think I'll marry her!"

"You are wedded to her for a day or two, at least," says I.

The lad made the most charming picture. Those rare eyes of his were roving in a very saucy way; his features were alert and delicate, yet strong, and emphasised in delightful fashion by Mrs. Polly Emblem's inimitable art. His clothes were very cunningly contrived, and he had a graceful ease of person that in a measure disguised the absence of soft curves. Besides, that enormous hoop petticoat was very much his friend, as it stood so far off from his natural figure that it created a shape of its own accord.

"My dearest Prue, how are you?" cries I with warmth, and pretending to embrace him.

"So my name is Prue?" says he, "a proper name, I vow."

"Then 'ware lest you soil it with an impropriety," says I, disapproving highly of the way in which he walked. "You are to impersonate my friend the Honourable Prudence Canticle. She is very fond of hymns. She thinks a lot about her soul, and is a wonderfully good young creature. But my dearest Prue, is that how Pilgrim walked upon his progress? Pray correct it, for it is indeed most immodest and unwomanlike. In four strides you have swaggered across the room."

"All right, dear Bab," says he, with an impudence that I itched to box his ears for. "But I so detest you niminy piminy fine ladies, with your affectations and your foibles. Therefore I remove my manners from you as far as possible. I spurn your mincing footsteps, dear. Besides, I am on the narrow and the thorny track, and the bigger strides I take the sooner I shall have walked across it."

"You must contrive to modulate your voice in a different key to that," says I, his mentor. "You must become far less roguish and impertinent; you must manipulate your skirts with a deal more of dexterity; and, above all, I would have you imitate my tone. The one you are using now is bourgeois, provincial, a very barbarism, and an insult to ears accustomed to refinement."

"Lard, Bab," says the wicked dog, "give me a chaney arange, or a dish of tay, for I'm martial tharsty."

"Prue," says I, "let me proceed to read you the first lesson."

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE MONSTROUS BEHAVIOUR OF MISS PRUE.

TO begin with, I instructed him in deportment. I put him through his paces with the exactitude of a dancing-master.

"Tread upon your toes, sir," lifting up my skirts a little to show him how; "neater and lighter, my lad. Do not put your foot upon the carpet like a hundred-weight of coals. Tip your chin a shade more upward; set your head a little backward; shorter strides and one shoe behind the other—so!"

As a pupil he proved extremely apt, and in a few minutes he was giving quite a tolerable imitation of the motions of a woman of quality. His petticoat bothered him exceedingly, but in a little time even these troubles he overcame. Once he tried a simper, and did it prettily. Then in a highly successful way he played his shoulders like an arch and laughing miss. His next attempt was at a curtsy, but here misfortune came, as his heel caught in his skirt and he fell flat upon his back.

"The penalty of impertinence," said I. "As though every delicate accomplishment of Venus is to be obtained in half-an-hour!"

He rose, however, with fine gravity and asked

me how it should be done. It was a part of his character to let nothing beat him, and in this instance he tried a full twenty times rather than a curtesy should become his master.

There was one subject in which we were much exercised. How were his coat and vest to be disposed of? The search was to be of the strictest kind, therefore no risks must be run. It was Emblem who grappled with the difficulty. Stealing to his lordship's dressing-room she mingled them temporarily with his clothing, as masculine attire in that place was not likely to excite remark.

This had just been done, I was still in the middle of my tutelage, and making Miss Prudence imitate the cadence of my voice in high falsetto, when a knock upon the door startled us extremely. Emblem turned white as any pillow-slip; I began to tremble and could not have spoke a word that minute for my life; but the disguised fugitive looked at me, and looked at Emblem, smiled a little, and calmly said "Come in!" in the identical tone he had been practising.

A terrible being sailed into the room; no less a person than my aunt. She paused upon the threshold to gaze at the fair stranger in both dignity and doubt. Unable to recall the face she screwed her gold-rimmed glasses on her nose and stared steadily down upon Miss Prue with that polite impertinence that flourishes most in dowagers. The time this manœuvre took gave me the necessary moment to recover myself. I seized it, smiled on my aunt's bland insolence and said:

"My dear aunt, permit me to present to you Miss Prudence Canticle, that very familiar and dear friend of mine of whom you have heard me so often speak. She shares all the secrets of my bosom, and I therefore, my dear aunt, commend her with the more confidence to yours."

"I am charmed, I am delighted, I am sure," says the dowager, sweeping a stately bow upon the phrase with great majesty.

"Madam," says the lad, "I'm infarnally glad of your acquaintancy."

My aunt, the dowager, was a person of too much breeding to express or to otherwise betray any astonishment at this; but I am sure she felt it, for though she had never seen Prue, my pious friend, *in propria persona*, she had seen her letters, and on the strength of those epistles had held her image up before me as a paragon of gentlewomen and a mirror of the Christian virtues. I dare not look at my aunt's stern mien lest I broke out in a peal of laughter; but the lad, with a slight curl at his lips, and a saucy gleam within his eye, met full the shock of it, and quailed not.

"Tis strange, my dear Miss Canticle," says my aunt with that sugared fluency in which she wrapped her sourest moods, "that I had no premonition of your coming. Barbara gives me not a word of it; I have even no hint of your arrival; and so, my dear Miss Canticle, I must beseech you to take things at Cleebly very much as you may find them, and accept this for their apology. Let me repeat, my dear Miss Canticle, that I had not

the ghost of an idea that we were about to be so greatly honoured."

Now I was in a fever of anxiety and fear, and the face of Emblem announced similar emotions. We were at such a disadvantage that to prompt Miss Prudence in the ordering of her speech and conduct was outside the question utterly. But 'twas little she needed prompting. For she seemed superbly at her ease, fell into fiction of the cheerfullest and most high-coloured sort, without one "ahem!" of hesitation; and contrived from the beginning to treat her majesty, my aunt, with the most easy familiarity she could possibly employ.

"I am sure the apology should be supplied by me," Miss Prudence says. "I never writ Bab a word about it, did I, darling? But t'other morning my papa orders the chaise for town. I asked him would he pass near Cleeby on the way? That he would, says he. Then, says I, you shall drop me down there, and, faith! I'll spend a week with my ownest Bab. All this age I have not seen her."

And I believe the incredible rogue would have kissed me on the spot, as I could not possibly have said him nay, had I not drawn my face from the threatening proximity of his mouth.

"Your papa, Miss Prudence?" my aunt echoed in surprise. "I was informed that he died five years ago at Paris."

I was horrified by the magnitude of this error he had made, for my aunt spoke, alas! too truly. I might have been spared my agitation, though.

"Oh!" Miss Prudence laughed, "my dear mamma hath taken another piece of household furniture unto herself since then."

"A what?" cries my aunt, fixing her glasses on again to cover her distress.

You will understand that the dowager—dear lady!—being the product of an earlier generation, construed this flippant mention of so ornamental an article as a papa as gross irreverence. Yet I breathed again at the lad's ingenuity. However, he had gone astray on another point, and my aunt was not the one to pass it by.

"But what are you doing in the north, my dear Miss Canticle, if I may make so bold as to inquire?" says she; "for I have always been told that your residences were Tunbridge Wells and Mitcham Green."

"You were not aware then, madam," replied Miss Prue, "that we bought quite recently a little place in Fifeshire?"

"Indeed!" says my aunt with interest, "and a very charming country to be sure." Then she turned to me and said: "Barbara, I am come to speak to you of a particular affair. Captain Grantley has just had the goodness to inform me that he proposes shortly to have this house searched from cellar to attic, to discover if that prisoner is hid anywhere within it. I told him that it was a most monstrous project, and one more monstrous still to undertake, as by that means our house and all its contents would be quite exposed to the mercy of his men, who being of the very scum can no more

be trusted with good furniture than can a cat with a jug of cream."

"Very true, dear aunt," says I, "and I trust you will oppose it."

"I have opposed it," says my aunt grimly; "but the Earl, your papa, and this Captain man are really most unreasonable men."

"Prisoner!" cried Miss Prue. "Search the house! La! we shall have some fun, I'm certain."

"We shall, indeed!" says I, even more grimly than my aunt.

Here it was that the dowager, to my infinite relief, bowed stiffly to Miss Prudence, and renounced the room in a distinctly disdainful manner.

"Bab," says the prisoner as soon as she was gone, "I consider that I have carried this off gallantly. But I fear, dear Bab, that if I stay here any longer than a day I shall prove a thorn in the flesh of that old lady. Her icy mien provokes me."

"Prue," says I, unable to repress the admiration that I felt for the agile fashion in which he had crept out of a corner uncomfortably tight, "you will either attain to the post of Prime Minister of England or a public death by hanging. There will be no half course in your career, I'm certain. For your wickedness is as great as is your wit. But you really must think a trifle more about your pious character, my dear Miss Canticle."

Now that my aunt was apprised of Miss Prue's presence in the house, it behoved us to wear bold faces and put our trust in impudence and the good

luck that usually attends it. She must be presented to the Earl, and share our daily life entirely. She must be treated as an equal, and carry herself with sustained dignity and ease; she must be nothing less than perfect in the playing of her part, else questions would be provoked, any one of which might prove fatal to our scheme. Therefore, I occupied the interval between this and a quarter after four, at which hour I was due at the tea-table in the dowager's drawing-room, in schooling Prue in carriage, etiquette, and family affairs. And I cannot repeat too often that if this lad was not by birth and training a person of the mode, his natural instinct for mummery was in itself so admirably fine that had he been asked to don the royal purple of a potentate, he would have filled the throne at a moment's notice, have looked a king and acted like one. Besides, he had this very great advantage—he had been bred to no sphere in particular, and there seemed such a native richness in his character as made him ripe for any. The keenest observation of man and nature supplied in him a course of education in the schools. Therefore his mind had no predisposition towards any avocation. He was neither a physician nor a priest, a fop nor a vendor of penny ballads. He was just (in my idea) an intrepid young adventurer, a charming vagabond, with enough of sense and courage in him to become anything he chose.

For the nonce he chose to be a woman of quality. Therefore he was that woman, plus a dash of native devilry that she was born without. The way he

played his eyes, the archness of his simpering, his ringing laugh, the sauciness that salted all he said, his smiling rogueries, his dimpled impudence, his downright, damnable adorableness, he appeared to put on with his dress, and wore with the elegant propriety of one who had dwelt in Spring Gardens all her days.

"My lad," says I, "you step a point beyond me quite. Here have you picked up Saccharissa's every trick in twenty minutes. 'Tis a miracle, I'll swear."

"Fudge," says he, "'tis no miracle. The living model is before me, and the rest is no more than a painter does when he transfers that model to a canvas. You twist your lips into a smile, and see—I ape 'em with my own." And the very trick I had of sardonically smiling from the corners of my mouth he immediately copied with marvellous fidelity.

"My Lady Barbara," says he, "you once disdained me with a glance. Here is the one you did it with."

Straight he gathered all his inches up and gazed down upon Emblem and myself with a severity awful to observe. As for his voice, it was thin and somewhat treble in its quality. But it was an instrument that had a singular variety of tone. Its natural note was boyish, fresh, and piercing; yet that did not prevent it from one moment scorning like an actress, nor the next from being missish, petulant, and shrill.

Pretty soon the ears of us conspirators were

assailed with strange and reiterated sounds. The soldiers had begun their search.

The three of us looked at one another, and debated what to do. The Honourable Prudence Canticle turned to me, and said :

“Where’s that pistol, Bab? There might be an accident, you know, and if there is—well!”

So much was implied by that doleful monosyllable that I handed the weapon to him without demur. He desired to keep it in the pocket of his breeches, but it called for a deal of judicious aid on the part of Emblem and myself ere his enormous hooped petticoat could be supported while he introduced it. Then a nice point had to be considered. Should we stay where we were and await the enemy, or repair to the drawing-room and meet it under the protection of the presence of the formidable Lady Caroline?

Miss Prue languidly professed that she was quite indifferent, being perfectly easy in her mind that her skirts, her powder, and her head-dress would be more than a match for a corporal and five foolish troopers.

“So long as that Captain remains strapped to his board in the library,” she assured us, “I snap my fingers at ’em.”

“Then you will confess,” says I, “that Captain Grantley has the power to disconcert you?”

“Well—yes,” says she reluctantly, “because—well Captain Grantley is the devil.”

“He is the devil,” says I triumphantly, “never a doubt about it. ’Tis the only phrase that fits him,

and I've employed it several times myself. Prue, do you know that I hate—I detest—that man, and yet, and yet—”

“And yet,” says Prue, breathing hard, and her vermilion lips studded with two white teeth, “Bab, I quite agree with you that there is always a big ‘and yet’ sticking out of the Captain’s character.”

Further discourse was cut off by the uncere-
monious entry of two soldiers. The first was Corporal Flickers. His eye fell on three flaunting petticoats, and three faces of bold brilliancy surmounting them. Nothing to denote the thin and haggard fugitive in these. It would be uncharitable to blame the man for permitting himself to be so beautifully fooled, for the serene interest of Miss Prue and her innocent wonderment at the Corporal’s appearance would have defied the majority of his intellectual betters to unmask her. And Miss Prue was so radiantly calm in the presence of the corporal that I am sure the pungent jest delighted her indeed.

Now I hope you will remember that this Mr. Flickers was that very red-haired wretch who had declaimed so powerfully against my Lady Barbara Gossiter and all her works, beneath the window of her ladyship at three o’clock that morning. A deadly feud was thus between us. At the same time, however, there was a sort of fascination about a man who was so terrible in opinion. There was defiance of all the things that were, crapulously shining in his beery orbs. In his nose, short and thick, and magnificently drunken,

was writ the pugilist, and worse, alas! the pummeller of the classes. A mighty hatred of the aristocracy was indicated on his honest brow. His mien was so determinedly aggressive, and so purple in its tint, that it might have been washed in the bluest blood of dukes and earls. Thus at sight of him, I could scarce refrain from shivering, as we are said to do when someone walks across our graves.

To him the searching of my chamber was a pleasing duty. It involved iconoclasm and a tearing down of gilded luxury. And there was a sufficient unction in the rude methods he employed. He half tore the window curtain from the pole in shaking out its folds; he committed dreadful carnage with the bed, tearing sheets, and flinging counterpane and bolster to the ground. He wrenched one of the doors off my wardrobe, such was the vigour with which he opened it, and so ruthlessly mishandled one of my costliest robes that it was damaged beyond amendment. He was able to knock a china model of Apollo off the mantelpiece and shatter it into a hundred pieces on the hearth. He cracked one of my finest Knellers when he tapped upon the wall to assure himself it was not hollow. He contrived to tread upon my poodle and render it permanently lame as he examined the floor and wainscot. He cut the Turkey carpet in a dozen places by the way he used his heels; and when he paused to take a little breath, he calculated things so excellently well that by suddenly dropping fourteen stones of

beer and democratic blackguardism on a frail settee, he smashed it in the middle, and in the fall he had in consequence had the good luck to put his elbow through the glass door of a cabinet. And he did all this with such a pleasant air that I almost wept for rage.

"Mr. Flickers," says I, mildly, "my compliments to you. In five minutes you have managed to smash such an astonishing quantity of furniture that in future, with your kind permission, I shall amend the adage, and instead of speaking of a bull in a china-shop, shall phrase it a Corporal in a lady's chamber."

"Dooty, my lady," says the Corporal, simply, but trying to crush a mirror into fragments by jamming his back against it, "dooty don't wait fer duchesses. Dooty must be done."

To show how completely he was the slave of it, resumed his happy occupation at the word: stepped lightly to my clothes closet, and wreaked such a horrid havoc on my dresses that the tears appeared in poor Mrs. Polly Emblem's eyes.

But this catastrophe had another side. And to my mind it was not unpleasant. It was supplied by the behaviour of Miss Prue. When the cheerful Corporal was in the midst of his depredations in the closet, that young lady grew a lively red with rage, and doubled up her not unsubstantial but mittened fists, and shook them in the Corporal's direction.

"Gad!" she whispered, whilst Emblem and myself had to put forth desperate efforts to restrain her, "I would give a golden guinea to be Anthony Dare

for just two minutes. I'd smash as many bones in his drunken carcase as he hath smashed these bits of furniture."

Captain Grantley's threat was executed to the letter. They sought the prisoner or evidence of him in every nook and cranny from the cellar to the skylight, but became none the wiser for their pains. Ruefully they told this to their commander, fuming in his fetters. I also went and told the Captain this.

Conducting my friend Miss Prue to the tea-table of my aunt, I was charmed more than I can express to notice how immediately this young lady ordered her bearing and her conversation to a harmony that accorded with the dowager's personality and her own. Launching these ladies properly on a topic on which they were both well qualified to speak, to wit, the relations then existing between the Church of England and the Church of Rome, I tripped forth to the library to carry my compliments to its occupant. He was still in the exact posture in which I had previously seen him. But he was not writing now. Instead, his fingers were tapping the table in their impotence, and his eyes were red and fierce. He looked the picture of the tiger caged, and fretting away his heart in his captivity. His cheeks were wan and hollow, for the whole affair was a bitter load upon his mind. Indeed, he made a quite pathetic figure, chafing in a strict confinement at a time when it was desperately necessary that he should be abroad.

"Captain, how's the knee?" I began with sweetness.

"It gives me no trouble I assure you, my dear lady," he answered, smoothly, "but it is really very good of you to ask." He gently smiled, for he was well aware that I positively knew that it troubled him exceedingly, and that my inquiry did not spring from any kindly impulse.

"I am here to tell you, sir," says I, and observed the poor wretch keenly to catch him wincing, "that those fine troopers of yours have failed completely in their expedition. Completely failed, sir! And as you have had the goodness to confer ignominy on this household and myself by insinuating that we are harbouring a rebel, I am here to thank you for it."

"Yes," he sighed, "I know they've failed." He looked at his knee reproachfully.

"Captain," says I, in a voice that was angelical; "how unfortunate it is that you yourself could not have led this man-hunt. I'll warrant that you would have run this fugitive to earth."

'Twas more than the fellow could endure.

"Curse this knee!" says he, and again, "curse this knee!"

The baited wretch looked so dolefully on the board and the bonds that detained his damaged limb, that I fell forthwith into laughing at him.

"Pray do not spare your curses, Captain," I encouraged him, "tear your hair; conjure all the devils. Call a murrain in blue blazes down upon your evil state. Prithee, damn your scurvy leg, fair sir! But, dear Captain, there you are. You cannot move an inch, my friend. And reflect that your six

zanies are as likely to catch this rebel as they are to catch a bird by putting salt upon its tail. Consider all this, dear Captain, and tell me what round sum sterling you would pay to be in a like hale condition to myself."

To show him what that hale condition was, and to aggravate his woes, I prettily gathered up my gown and danced him a few corranto steps daintily and lightly.

Poor fellow! These taunts of mine went right home into his soul. In spite of himself, he had to writhe; and I, finding him so helpless, did but prick and gall him more. I do not pride myself on this, for it was a piece of wanton cruelty, and perhaps a piece of cowardice. But I will be as honest as I can, and confess that I had an instinct that this was not the highest style of woman; but then, you see, I never did set up for a saint. Here was my enemy prostrate, and how could one resist the joys of trampling on him! Ascribe this, an it please you, to a full-blooded female nature!

The Captain bore my exultation for a time with fortitude, but then said, with a bluntness that I thought refreshing:

"Let us understand one another in this matter, my Lady Barbara. You play a winning game at present. You have the prisoner successfully concealed, and up to now the honours are entirely yours. It is the simplest thing in the world to hoodwink six clumsy fellows, but do not think, dear madam, that you hoodwink their unlucky officer. He may now be taken in the leg and tied

up to a board, but sooner or later he will have his liberty, and then, believe me, my dearest madam, that some persons I might name may perhaps be dancing on another string."

The Captain's words were to be respected, for he was indeed a dangerous foe. None the less I scorned them, and replied in high derision:

"Perhaps, dear Captain, you will take my arm and make a tour of the house yourself? You seem to repose very little confidence in your followers."

"No, Lady Barbara," says he, "I will not do that, much as I would like. But I would fain remind you that since our last interview a day hath fled. Therefore, six days only now remain ere this is despatched to London. That is unless the rebel happens to be retaken in the meantime."

This was his chance to repay my insolence. You may be sure he took it, and also that my heart quailed when he held that sinister blue paper up, and asked me whether I did not think it elegant.

"And again would I venture to suggest, my Lady Barbara," says he, "that, though the first fall may rest with you, the game is not quite over yet." The man smiled with such a malicious affability that I dropped him a curtsy and swept out in a huff.

That blue paper was my nightmare. It *must* not go to London, yet how could I give the prisoner up? I desired to eat my cake and yet to keep it, and felt like working myself into a passion because this

was impossible. Accordingly, when I repaired to a dish of tea, and to have an eye upon Miss Prue, my mind was both disordered and perplexed. I was grieved to discover that the dowager and my dear Miss Canticle had discarded religious topics for the secular. Miss Prue was pouring into my aunt's receptive ear some most surprising details that presumably adorned the histories of many of the brightest ornaments of our world. And she was doing this with a vivacity that took my breath away.

"God bless me! yes," Miss Prue was saying as I entered, "of course I know my Lady Wensley Michigan. A dreadful woman, madam! Plays at hazard every night till three, and poor Michigan hath to put a new mortgage on his property every morning."

"Never heard anything so monstrous!" cries my aunt in horror, but very anxious nevertheless to glean as many facts of a similar kind as possible. "And my dear Miss Canticle, are you acquainted with the Carews, and the Vortigerns, and those people?"

"Am acquainted with 'em all," cries my dear Miss Canticle, with a promptitude and emphasis that made me shudder; "and a pretty company they are! Shouldn't tell you a word of this, my dear madam, only it is as well for persons who know what virtue is to be forewarned against those who don't."

"Exactly," says my aunt, with a grim and gleaming eye.

"Prue," says I, sweetly as a song, though I was pale with rage, "I am going to dress for supper. Come along with me, dear, and I will show you my new watered silk. 'Twill make you dream of it to-night."

"A watered silk!" she cried, and instantly jumped up and followed me with a wonderful excitement that only a woman could have shown. How could I be angry with a villain with such a deal of genius?

"Prue," says I, as we ascended to my chamber, "you are a perfect devil."

"Perfection," says she, "is the pinnacle of womanhood. So long as I am perfect I don't much care. 'Tis what I aim at. I would rather far be a complete fiend than an incomplete she-angel! For you know as well as I do, dear Bab, that every she-angel is of necessity an incomplete one."

"What I wish to know," I demanded, being well aware that I could not argue her out of this position, "is the exact number of my friends you have slandered. Do you know that my aunt was speaking of the very flower of the aristocracy? Now tell me instantly, how long has this gone on?"

"Oh! about a quarter of an hour," says she, with an intolerable impudence, "and I spoke with the rapidity of a woman who is scandalous. Gad! I have played my part remarkably."

"Oh, you wretch!" cries I; "and what is it that you've said?"

"Nay," says she, "'tis not what I have said.

'Tis what I have not said. Let me see: the Marchioness of Quorn is bald as a toad when her wig is taken off; her ladyship of Chickenley is twenty years older than she looks, and hath a married daughter. The beautiful Miss Brandysnap drinks whisky-possets on the sly, and got the jumps the other morning. But that is a family affair, as the venerable rake her father had to be carried out of the Bodega every evening for a quarter of a century with nine pints of claret underneath his shirt. Then good Madam Salamander hath the fiery temper of old Pluto, and almost committed a manslaughter on her maid a week last Tuesday. There is a quantity of other things I've said, but I'll not tarry to retail 'em."

"Don't," I implored her, and took the stopper from my phial of aromatic vinegar. The Honourable Prudence Canticle was getting on my nerves.

CHAPTER X.

I PLAY KATHARINE TO MR. DARE'S PETRUCHIO.

IT was our custom at Cleebby to sit down to the evening meal at seven o'clock. We held supper a function in our country day. Then it was that the Earl, my heroical papa, gout or no gout, would grace the table with his embroidered presence, and ogle his daughter, or his sister-in-law the ancient Caroline. This rather than his eyes, once so bright and fatal, should vainly spend their waning lustres on a stolid dish or an unresponsive spoon. The poor vamped-up old gentleman, with that monumental vanity of man that we women feed for our private ends, would not admit, even to himself, that though this dog had once enjoyed his day, that day now was over. He might be condemned to death; the wrinkles might strike through his powder; he might be toothless, doddering, with a weak action of the heart, and his age in a nice proportion to his crimes; he might be propt up in a back-strap and a pair of stays, the completest and most ghastly wreck in fact you ever set your eyes upon—that is before his man had wound him up and set him going for the day—but he would never admit that he was old, and that his vogue was buried with his youth.

and that his vogue was buried with his youth. He would bow with depth and majesty as of yore, but with rather more of rheumatism; he would toast Venus just as often and sigh as profoundly as he did so; yet he never took the red wine to his shrivelled lips with quite that gusto that was his wont when he had blood and a pulse to grow inflamed in the pious ceremony. But he would tell a stranger confidentially that though people said his age was forty-eight, 'twas very wrong of 'em to talk like that, as his proper age was fifty. And I, who really am at times a tender-hearted wretch, would melt visibly every evening at his decrepit compliments and his senile quizzing glasses. What a fine, unsubduable old gentleman he was till the hour his wicked soul and his corrupt old carcase were consigned to the eternal care of that other fine old gentleman to whom he had as it were in many ways a sort of family resemblance!

"Prue," says I, the moment we conspirators were assembled in my chamber, "this evening you have to undergo an Ordeal. We must prepare you for it, both in the body and the spirit with great care."

I hinted of its nature, and lightly and not unlovingly touched in the character of that gallant heathen, my papa.

"La! the naughty old gentleman," pouts Miss Prue. "I must be careful of him."

She assumed a face of copy-book propriety that is invariably worn with a pinafore and plaited hair

at a seminary for young ladies. Then she turned to the maid and said :

"Now, Emblem, touch my eyes up. And improve my cheeks a little."

Mrs. Polly did as she was bid ; dabbed the powder on daintily and subtly, made her a provoking dimple with uncommon art, pencilled her brows arch and swarthy, then heated a hairpin in the candle and curled her eye-lashes into a provoking crispness, a trick she had borrowed from the French. Then she selected a new robe for her, even more elegant than the one she wore, and while the maid, to give her greater ease and comfort in the wearing of it, unpicked a portion of the bodice and concealed the opened seams by cunning contrivances of lace, Miss Prue assiduously practised the poise and movements of her form. For an hour she went up the room and down the room under my direction, with skirts gracefully lifted now in two fingers of one hand, now in two fingers of the other. And so intelligent and persistent was she that soon she seemed to sail across the floor with the lofty, imperious motion of a woman of quality.

Thereafter she besieged the mirror ; to practise smiling, be it said. Lo ! at the first trial there was a bewitching dimple at the left corner of her mouth revealed. And those lips, how red they were, and how inviting ! What may not red ochre do ? Such illumination of those doors of wit looked seducing, irresistible. Later, she tried a little trill of laughter. What a fluted woodnote did she make of it ! Next she tried a little trill and a smile

together. The result was really too adorable. But to my surprise Miss Prue frowned and shook her pretty, wicked head.

"Bab," says she, "it will not do, dear. I showed my teeth, and one is missing, exactly in the middle of the upper jaw. You have not a tooth that you could lend me, darling? Besides, two other prominent members are blackened with decay. 'Twere best I kept my lips close. And wearing 'em so tight, I must be careful lest I suck the paint off."

"Prue," says I severely, "you are more pre-cautious than myself when I am robing and posturing for a conquest. Forbear, my girl, for this is vanity."

At this she winced, and palpably. I held my sides for laughter when I heard the reason why.

"Bab," says she, "when you call me girl, do you know it hurts quite horribly?"

"Girl, girl, girl!" cries I, with great emphasis.

"Bab," says she, with real roses in her cheeks, "if you call me that again I'll punch your—er—I mean—I'll—er——"

"You mean you'll what, my delightful little girlie?" says I, gloating on her rage.

"I'll kiss you," says she, revealing the red ochre on her lips.

At that I did desist, for I was not sure, judging by her looks, whether she was not hoping that I would take her at her word. And in any case I knew she would be quite the equal of her threat.

"Certainly I am robing and posturing for a con-

quest," she resumed. "To-night, I conquer your papa."

"What?" cries I aghast at her audacity. "You would never dare!"

"Bab," says she, "I think you will discover that Miss Prue is as much a Dare as ever was Mr. Anthony. And if he once kissed a heathen, surely she may captivate a saint."

I thought her impudence was charming, but could not let it pass without remark.

"You call me heathen, Prue. 'Pon my soul, I think the kettle calls the pot!"

"Perhaps that is so," she replied, "yet you know you are a terrible barbarian. Still, to-night I conquer your papa. Why should I support the pains without the glory? If I endure the indignity of petticoats, let me have their compensations too."

Her saucy words brought me a brave idea.

"Prue," says I, "while you conquer my papa, I'll go and captivate the Captain."

Even as I spoke it flashed upon me what I had to gain. Let me once reduce him to complete infatuation, as I had done on a previous occasion, then I might venture to divorce him from his duty, and prevail upon him to destroy that horrible blue paper. The Earl, my papa, would then have nought to fear from the Tower.

Therefore, like Miss Prue, I fell to trimming myself up against the evening. I had out a new exquisite gown, that was only yesterday from the tailors, and a very lovely modish article. And what a virginity there is about an

unworn dress! How unwrinkled and serene in its countenance; how chaste and creaseless in its outward semblance! What a wooing look it hath with which to provoke the eye and mind of Millamant! Its graces wedded to her own, and where's the bosom to resist that combination of art and nature? Once on, however, and the nap is off the velvet of your dress and your desire also. The thing is not so perfect as it seemed. The armpit chafes you; there is a gusset out of place; it is a twenty-fifth of an inch too low of neck, or a twenty-fifth of an inch too high. The sleeve is too much like a pyramid, or not enough so. And you fear it is just two days behind the time. You would return it to the tailor on the instant, only—only you so crave to wear it this very night. Then you recall that all your others have been similar; fair and smiling failures; in the wardrobe supreme and flawless; on the body detestable and tight. You wear it three times; it begins to cleave to you like a friend, when lo! the silk frays, the lilac fades, the mode's beyond it. I suppose a perfect robe ne'er will be fashioned till Nature fashions a perfect wearer. Your pardon, reader, but I am as privileged and fit to soliloquise upon a dress, I take it, as a poet is upon the stars, or a philosopher upon the dust and destination of his uncle. *Ohe! jam satis est.*

The Honourable Prue was dressed at last. A more ravishing figure I never saw; all flounce and furbelow; sprigs of japonica upon her petticoat; her face a painted glamour; a wondrous starry lustre in

her eyes. Emblem put the crowning touches to her hair, and applied a special powder to it that improved a common yellow to a most uncommon gold. I bestowed my best pearl necklace on her, fastened a great jewel among her artifice of curls, set diamond rings upon her fingers and braceleted her wrists, though the manner in which they were crammed upon 'em hath yet to be explained.

How fair she looked, and what an archness in her lifted chin and laughing eyes! Seen under the subdued and mellow lamplight, that wrapped soft shades and gentle tints about her, I declare I never saw one more fortunate in beauty at Kensington or Windsor.

Having thus robed her to perfection and heightened her appearance till she might melt one with a look, we put her out and bade her lock herself in Emblem's chamber, whilst inimitable Mrs. Polly trimmed me for conquests too.

In a time, a long way less than half Miss Prue had occupied, I was declared to be accomplished properly. I wish you could have seen us when that young person was fetched in to criticise and to stand the ordeal of comparison. She stood before me, set her head a little to one side, as if deliberating nicely, and looked over all my inches keenly but complacently.

"Hum! you are not ugly," was her verdict.

"And you a man?" I cries, for I could not bring myself to consider that a veritable member of the Sex of Victims could damn me with faint praise of this sort.

"Well, Bab," he says, "you are not quite in my style, you see."

"*Your* style?" says I, aghast. I, the toast of the Prince of Wales, and the source of a thousand sonnets, not quite in the style of him! There was a deal of whim and quaintness in the boy.

"I like 'em clinging," says he, modestly.

"You like 'em clinging. You'll perhaps explain," says I, flicking my fan perilously near his ears.

"I prefer the twining ivy to the big-eyed dog-daisy or the bold chrysanthemum."

The fan descended on him smartly.

"I can suffer your impudence easier than your taste," I sighed; "but both should be prayed for in the churches."

"Kissable and kind," says he, "there's nought to beat 'em. A modest violet of a downcast diffidence, prettily sigheth like a wind of spring; obedient to a breath; trembles at a look; thinks my lord Me the finest person under God. You know the kind I mean, Bab; plenty of blush about 'em—the very opposite of you."

"My lord Me," cries I, delightedly, "that's you, my lad, outside and in. It hits you to the very eyebrow, and Man also."

"To be sure," says he, with grandeur, "if it hits me, it hits Man also. I am Man, and Man is Me."

"And both are the vainest things that breathe," says I.

"Except new gowns," he retorted villainously.

"Pish," says I, "I will not bandy with you."

There is only one thing more deplorable in nature than a woman arguing, and that is a boy who is impertinent."

The time antecedent to the supper bell we spent with profit. To-night I must be brilliant if I was to make a conquest of a hard-bit officer, who knew the world and Madam Ogle. I suggested, therefore, that I was put through a rehearsal now, to test the scope of my abilities and school them to the part they had to play.

"Prue," says I, "I must ask you to change your alias for twenty minutes. You are to be Captain Grantley, and I dear Lady Barbara. We are to suppose this chamber to be the library, where you sit in weariness, misery, and rage, with your shattered knee strapped to a board. There is a blue paper in your custody which you have sworn to send to London if the prisoner is not retaken in a week. I enter to make a conquest of you, with the object of exciting you to destroy the document you hold. Now, Prue, sit down and turn yourself into the Captain, and I will woo you with a greater ardour than I ever wooed a man before."

"And by Jupiter and Mars, dear Lady Barbara, you've got to do if you are going to reduce this citadel," says she, becoming Captain Grantley on the spot.

Nothing must suffice her but she should fill a warm chair near the fire, with another a yard or two away on which to prop her damaged leg. The Captain at once began to damn his knee with a vigour that was astonishingly lively; called my Lady Barbara

a saucy jade and something of a devil into the bargain for letting rebels out in the middle of the night and providing them with pistols. Thereupon I sailed up to him, and opened the rehearsal by asking how his leg did.

"Oh, it is infernal!" cries the Captain with an oath.

"I am sorry for it," says I, sympathetically.

"You will be," says he grimly, and swore again.

"My dear Captain," says I, with a wistful softness, "it makes me quite dismal, I assure you, to discover you in such a grievous strait." A tear stood in my eye.

"Dear Lady Barbara," says he, "you can tell that to my leg."

"Ah, dear Captain," says I, with soft-breathing tenderness, "I wish you could see into my heart."

"'Twould be more difficult than pearl-fishing in deep seas," says he. "Besides, a heart, they tell me, is a thing you have not got."

"O, that I had not one! It would then be insensible to your masculine perfection that makes such a havoc of it now."

"Poor devil!" says he, very softly, and then again, "poor little pretty devil, I wish I were not such an extremely handsome man."

"Po-or lit-tle pret-ty dev-il!" I repeated, dwelling on each syllable, for surely arrogance could no farther go.

"Now then, woo away!" says he.

I knew that the real performance was not to be of the lightest kind, but if in any way it was to present

the difficulties of this rehearsal, heaven help me through it! But I told myself not to be daunted by a boy, whose behaviour, when all was said, was only a piece of mummery. This present subjection of the Captain's heart proved, however, one of the sternest businesses I ever undertook. It was a fortress walled with stone and flanked with batteries. Again and again I was repulsed in my advances; the energy of my glances, the fire of my speech, the assaults of my smiling, were defied and consistently cast back. Emblem certainly enjoyed it; I am sure the Captain did; and I—well, I found this sport of such an exhilarating kind that I began to direct my attacks in grim, unflinching earnest. I began to forget Captain Grantley and Miss Prue, and the masquerader in a petticoat, in Anthony Dare, the hunted fugitive. For this was the Man who at last had come into my life. No doubt about it. My lord Me in his sublime unheed of our elaborate Court code of manners, had rudely forced an entrance into my sternly-guarded heart. He had arrived there by virtue of most audacious blustering, and alack! he looked as though he meant to stay.

Wherefore, though our present passages might appear extremely spirited play-acting to Emblem and to him, the more I was involved therein, and the warmer I became, the less distinctly could I say where frolic ended and reality began. Never was I so artful as in this amorous farce. A word and a look hitherto, had sufficed to fetch a sigh out of the choicest waistcoat. To be sure we were engaged upon a jest, but pretty soon Mrs. Polly Emblem was the

only one of us who clung to that opinion. The lad had wit enough to see at once that my wooing grew too desperately stern to be mere mummery. When he repulsed my twentieth advance, and Mrs. Polly laughed outright at the fun without observing that her mistress was biting her lips with rage, the young villain, noting my occupation, and perhaps the mortification of my face, said :

"Dear Lady Barbara, I beseech you to forget me. It gives me terrible great pain to create such a flutter in your heart. But, my poor, dear lady, I would have you consider that your case is only one of many. Truly, I am not responsible for the manly graces and the upright character that have brought you to this pass. Dear lady, there have been others. And to them, tender souls! I invariably promise to be a brother; cheerfully, therefore, will I admit you to their number, for 'tis not the least sweet of my traits that to my victims I ever am humane."

The saucy style of him spurred me so keenly that my methods grew still more vigorous. But pleading, soft speeches did but increase his insolence. Raillery he laughed at; glances amorously bold put him in a saucy humour; glances amorously tender left him cold. He shook his head at these devices.

"I like 'em clinging," he reminded me.

I fell upon wistfulness and a pensive air. My demeanour grew as subdued and meek as anything out of heaven. Butter would not have melted in my mouth, you would have thought; nor, judging by the disposition of my countenance, could I have

said "Bo!" to the arrantest goose of the male persuasion. My voice become a low, sweet song, and as melodious as the simple airs I used to play upon the virginal when I was a girl. That was before I learned to play on a more responsive instrument Man, I mean, that lordly thing, that harpsichord which beauty and intelligence perform all tunes upon at their capricious pleasure.

Fortune had denied me neither of these requisites. Full thoroughly had I used this natural magic. My finger-tips had thrilled a hundred strings. I had played any air I pleased upon a Prime Minister, a periwigged Ambassador, a Duke with acres and the gout, a Field-Marshal, with as many stars upon his chest as a frosty night could show you; and at least one Personage, who, being of the Blood, it is temerity to mention. If I acted Queen Elizabeth to these Sir Walter Raleighs—that is, if I so much as wiped my feet upon them—I made them happy for a week. And they had their rent rolls and their pedigrees! Indeed, one and all wore such quantities of gold lace on their coats that when the world heard of my depredations, it exclaimed: "Bab Gossiter is the very luckiest woman that ever flicked a fan." Therefore, was it not a paradox that I should prefer a kinless beggar to them all, and that he, presumably, preferred any slum-slut to my Lady Barbara?

"Why, you stoic villain!" I cried out, "you seem every whit as insensible to tenderness as to the Cleopatra manner. Do you not see my mood to be as melting as the morning sun?"

"Confess now," says he provokingly, "that you yearn to beat me with your fan?"

"Faith, that's true," says I.

"Then," says he, "this tenderness of yours is but a cloak you do put on to cover up Old Termagant. Your real nature is as sweet and gentle as an earthquake. Your meekness is a mantrap in which to snare a poor wretch with a shattered knee, for you are about as tame and docile in your character as is a rude lion of Arabia. Fie, my dearest cheat, you do not catch Anthony Dare for your husband thus—that is, I mean James Grantley."

"Yes, that is you mean James Grantley," says I, seizing on his error.

"Or, if it comes to that," says he, "you can include Mr. Anthony Dare in that category. That is another man you will not catch for husband."

"'Tis a pity," I said, stroking my chin in a thoughtful way; "for, my lad, I should make you a very fiend and Tartar of a wife. Your hair is pretty straight at present, but let us set up matrimony for six months and I would curl it for you."

"By thunder you would not!" he cries, sharp as the crackling of a musket, and the fire that darted from his eye I thought worthy of a classical quotation; "you would be mild as a milk-breasted dove and the obedientest little wife in the world."

"Milk-breasted dove! Obedientest little wife! I should indeed," says I, putting on my fury-look.

Poor Mrs. Polly and the fops of London were wont to tremble at it horribly, but Mr. Anthony never so much as honoured it with a blink.

"Six months," says he, quite calmly, "and 'twould be, 'Barbara, bring my slippers hither,' and hither would they come, without one solitary word."

"Without one solitary word?" says I; "come, that is an exaggeration now. I'm sure I should reply, 'certainly my lord,' and drop a curtsy to your honour's worship."

"Not even that," he said; "without one solitary word. And I should say, 'Barbara, fetch my snuff-box.' 'Barbara, darn my hose,' and so forth. And you would do it all with an instant obedience that would make you a pattern to your sex."

"I suppose your honour would beat me if I failed to do this."

"Madam, you would not fail. I should be your husband."

Emblem laughed outright at the sublime sternness of his face. But I think had that lad put forth his hand just then in the manner of a king, I must have dropped upon my knees and kissed it as a most duteous subject of his majesty. Despite his youth, his powder and his petticoats, as he sat there solemnly and said this, he cut a wonderful fine figure.

"But this is talk," says I, determined to correct his youthful arrogance. "A kinless beggar may not aspire to the hand of a princess."

"And does not wish to do," says he, and made me wince. It seemed that when it came to fist-cuffs he could hit the harder.

"Yet if you did you could never marry me, you know. A cat may look at a king, but beyond that it never goes."

"That is as may be," he replied; "but man proposes, God disposes, and what doth woman do?"

"Acquiesces, I suppose," says I, and groaned to think so.

"Extremely true," says he, "woman acquiesces. And if Man, in the person of myself, proposed to make a husband for you, your husband I should be unless God disposed it otherwise, which is not likely, for Heaven hath been very much on my side hitherto. Deny, an you can, that if to-morrow morning I so much as put my little finger up and whistled to you, you would be in my arms before the evening."

"I do deny it," says I so fiercely, that the blood rushed to my face.

"Of course you do," says he, "you would not be a woman else. You can lie as handsomely as any. But I'm thinking, my pretty Kate, I should make you a monstrous fine Petruchio."

"Bah!" I cries with monstrous scorn of him, "the boldest rogue outside the pillory, the raggedest beggar outside a ballad, playing Petruchio to my Lady Barbara! Have you blood, boy? have you titles? have you acres?"

"I have a heart, and I have a fist with which

to caress and to defend you," says he, with a terrible simple candour that pierced my breast like steel; "and I think I should make you the finest husband in the world. That is if I cared to do so—which I don't!"

Here such an agitation fluttered in my bosom suddenly, that I began to curse my folly for daring to rehearse so dangerous a scene.

CHAPTER XI.

I UNDERGO AN ORDEAL; I PLAY WITH A FIRE.

I SUPPOSE something must have altered in my face, in my effort to conceal the strange emotion that I suffered. For a soft look crept in his eye, and he said in that rich voice that had impressed me in the stable on the first night of our acquaintancy.

"My Lady Barbara, I have not hurt you? If once I pained my benefactress I could ne'er forgive myself."

"N-n-no," I stammered, for to be quite plain his tenderness played a greater havoc with me than his strength.

"I believe I have," he says, and a tear was in his voice, and such a deal of heaven in his look that I could not meet it, and had to gaze upon the ground.

"N-n-no," I stammered, and hated him for being a beggar and a fugitive, and Mrs. Polly Emblem for being in the room. And not less did I hate myself for being weak enough to forget my training, and my sphere of life.

"Captain," I sighed, in the voice of spring among the trees, "destroy that blue document of treason and dishonour, and all shall be forgiven you."

"My faith, I will destroy it!" he cried, with a fire smouldering in him, "and oh, my dearest lady, how good you are! How magnanimous!"

Our whimsical rehearsal of a play had carried us both into a stern earnestness it seemed; but I being the better schooled in deception and the social arts, was the quicker of recovery.

"Magnanimous!" I flashed out at him, and curled my lip in scorn, "you impudent young fool! Do you suppose that anything a beggar with bare elbows, whose mansion is the pillory, and whose carriage is the cart, can contrive to do or say will touch in any way my Lady Barbara, the toast of the Prince of Wales? You presumptuous rogue, to hear you talk one would think you at least a lord-in-waiting, or a minister of the Crown."

"Then you are not hurt?" he did persist.

"Hurt," I laughed, "if I am bitten with a fly, I am not hurt, though perchance I am annoyed."

"You are annoyed, madam?" he persisted still.

"You can call it annoyance, you little fly," I said.

"Then let me crave your pardon for it," he implored, and the humility was so delightful he did it with, that sure I could not say which was the most appealing—his meekness, his softness, or his insolence. By good luck the supper bell here intervened between us and our feelings; a few final touches from the maid, and we were tripping down the staircase to the Ordeal in the dining-room. The chamber was bright-lit; the dowager was already there, and the Earl, my papa, was momentarily expected. Let me confess to being feverish, and in a twitter of the nerves. One mishap, and all was over. But Miss Prue was the perfection of address; withstood the glare of the candelabra without a twitch; talked to the dowager

with the confidential light and charming silliness of a girl; carried herself with the queenly ease of one born to overcome; played her fan often and superbly; laughed archly with her shoulders in the female way, either "doated" on a thing, else thought it "horrid," and slightly patronised my aunt and me as one of equal breed, but as superior in her youth, and infinitely more so in her charms.

The vivacious creature was retailing to the dowager in her engaging fashion the foibles and private history, now for the first time published, of that "Old cat the Marchioness of Meux," when my foolish heart sprang in my throat, for the door was softly opened, and the Earl, my papa, smirkingly minced in.

I plunged headlong into the Ordeal. Sweeping up on the instant to his lordship, I saluted him with a great appearance of delight and eagerness, and sang out then:

"So happy that you've come, my lord; I am dying to present you to my dear Prue Canticle, the very Prue I love so, the dearest Prue in Christendom!"

His old lordship could not get a word in ere I had led him to the lovely minx who was entertaining my aunt the dowager in such a shocking manner. Mon père put on his glasses with the most killing simper, quizzed the handsome dog with high-bred insolence, and said: "*My dear being, how do you do?*"

The old gentleman bowed till you might have heard his gout creak.

Miss Prue flashed her eyes straight through him, and replied in a tone whose affectation was by no means inferior to his own:

"My lord of Long Acre! My emotion overcomes me."

Mine overcame me also. For she dared to whip out a dainty handkerchief of cambric with the device "B. G." woven into a monogram upon one corner. This she flirted and coquetted a quarter of a minute, but contrived to play her saucy eyes behind it in such a style as implied that she was not one half so youthful as she looked. His lordship was delighted, but the dowager grew as wintry as her locks, and endeavoured to arrange our places at the table in such a way that Miss Prue and he should be severely kept apart. My papa, however, was much too early a sort of bird to be out-manœuvred thus. Being a trifle deaf, 'twas not unnatural that he should utterly ignore the dispositions of my aunt. The inference was, of course, that he had not heard them. Therefore Miss Prue and he were somehow seated side by side, and conducted an amiable conversation, not in the mere language of the lips alone, but in the more ardent one of glances. The waistcoat of his lordship grew sigh-deranged, and mighty soon. Every time she fretted up her eyebrows, he paid her a compliment upon 'em; sometimes she repaid him with a repartee, sometimes provoked him to another by a pouting dimple in her mouth. The glass went often to his lips, and the lady was astute enough to encourage his industry without assisting in it.

"Barbara," my aunt whispered with a severity that made me shiver, "I am afraid your Miss Canticle is a minx."

"My dear aunt!" says I.

"Barbara, I said a minx," the dowager resumed,

"The way she hath set her cap at his lordship is disgraceful."

"Set her cap?" I repeated in deep perplexity, "my dear aunt, I do not know the phrase, and at least it must be provincial."

"Coquets then," says my aunt, more sternly than before.

"Coquets?" says I; "really, aunt, I am at a loss."

"Barbara, she is flirtish," pursued my aunt, who, as I have said already, was a dreadful engine when once she was set in motion.

"That means, my dearest aunt," says I, with a simplicity wonderful to hear, "one who attempts to trifle with the affections of another, does it not?"

At the word affections I blushed divinely. Yes, I know I did, for I was seated opposite a mirror (which I generally am) and noted the coming of the modest roses with an infinity of pride.

"Precisely, Barbara," says my aunt.

"Then I am sure, dear aunt," says I, with some enjoyment, "that you are under a misapprehension in this matter. How possibly could I admit a person of that character so near my bosom?"

"But surely," says my aunt, a very stickler for the mode, "a low-necked gown at supper-time should be *de rigueur*. The one your Miss Canticle is wearing is decidedly *de trop*."

"'Tis not altogether *décolleté*," says I, with a reflective air, "but then, you see, dear aunt, her physician says her chest's so delicate that at informal gatherings or in the country it behoves her to protect it."

"Dear me," says my aunt, "I should not have

thought it now. She doth not appear a particularly delicate or fragile kind of flower."

"Appearances are deceptive," says I, with a solemnity that padded out my wisdom.

"They are," says my aunt. There was a significance hidden somewhere in her voice that made me quail. "For I do observe that there is a special robustness about her appetite that would not suggest much delicacy in anything."

I shot a look across at the wretched Prue, and saw quite enough to justify my aunt. The manner in which that young person was partaking of a woodcock at the same instant as she was leading on my lord was most astounding. Before or since I have not seen a girl eat like it.

"Oh, I am a cruel, horrid thing," says I to my aunt. "To think of that poor child having come a journey, and being several hours in this house, and I not to have offered her a morsel till just now."

"Barbara," says my aunt to me, and sweetly, "in your absence from my tea-table I entreated her to partake of muffins and bohea. She had the goodness to reply that she had no partiality for sops, as she was neither a baby nor a bird."

"La, that's my Prue," cries I, laughing out aloud; "she is the dearest, originalest creature. Oh, the quaint girl! sure I can see her saying that with a merry twinkling sort of look!"

"Similar to the one she is now displaying to his lordship," says my aunt.

"Well, scarcely," I replied, "her expression would be rather drier and more contained than

that. And oh, dear, aunt! I had better tell you that this madcap, Prue, takes a particular delight in surprising and disconcerting those who are insufficiently acquainted with her character."

"She very well succeeds," my aunt said. "Yet, my dear, I must confess that you astound me. Her letters are perfect piety; they paint her as the soul of modesty, and quite marvellously correct. I should have judged her to be a highly genteel person."

"On the strength of her epistles, I should also," I replied, "but then I know my wicked, roguish Prue. That reverential tone she uses in them is another of her freaks, you see, dear aunt."

Alas! this straw was altogether too much for the poor indignant camel.

"Barbara!" says my aunt, "I desire you to forego in the future all intercourse with this—this person."

Meantime Miss Prue and my papa, the Earl, were become perilously intimate. There was a stream of brimming wine-pledging wit that flowed between them, very entrancing and alluring, to a favourite toast, who sat outside the pale of it talking to her aunt.

What a pair they made, this old beau masquerading as a young one, and this nameless tattered beggar masquerading as his mistress! And life or death was the stake for which the poor lad played. I could not bear to think of his position. It turned my bosom cold. But how consummate was his game! With what genius and spirit did he conduct it! And I think I never saw such courage, for it must have called for a higher fortitude than any of the battlefield. Looking on this pair in the wonder

of my heart I was far too fired in the brave lad's cause, not to mention the urgency of my own, to once forget the Captain fretting solitary in his bonds. Therefore I remembered that my hour for action was at hand.

After the meal, I waited till this trio were seated at the cards; then having lent Prue a sufficiency of money to enable her to play, I told my aunt that I proposed to go and cheer the Captain in his solitude.

The unhappy wretch was greatly as I had left him. He was perhaps a little gaunter from his fretfulness. But his knee was not easier, nor his heart more peaceable.

"Captain," I announced myself as sweetly as could be, "I know you to be mortal dull in this extremity. Therefore if I can I am come to cheer you in it. And I have a deal of compassion for you."

The Captain could not quite conceal his look of pleasure, and reading it, I took the tone and speech I had used to be exceeding pat to the occasion.

"How good of you, my Lady Barbara," says he, with a gratefulness I knew to be sincere, "to think of me in my affliction; nay, how good of you to think of me at all."

At first I was confounded that a man so shrewd and piercing in his mind as Captain Grantley, should be so disarmed with my simple airs, and be so unsuspicious of a motive for them. But then a lover is very jealous of himself, and if the object of his adoration tells him to his face that she sometimes thinks about him, and proves the same by her presence at his side, he is so anxious to believe her

that he the more readily persuades himself of her veracity. Besides, Beauty makes the wise man credulous. Sure it is hard to disbelieve her, else her amorous fibs and her sighing insincerities ne'er would have slain so many of the great figures of the histories. Even the Antonys must meet their Cleopatras.

"Ah, dear lady," says the Captain, with a sparkle in his manly features that became them very well, "the prospect that your presence brings makes me almost happy in my accident. A bitter wintry night, a rosy fire, a bottle of wine, and a lively conversation with one whose beauty is the rival of her mind—surely this is the heart's desire?"

He prayed me to seat myself beside the blaze. I did this, for I thought the place was favourable, as by the position of the lamp it threw my figure in the shade. Do not think I feared to compete with the braveries of light; but I hold that the tints of it should be harmonised with the tones and feelings of the players. In the theatre they are careful not to burn blue fire at a love scene. And to-night as I was not to attempt a victorious entry of the Captain's heart with a pageant of smiles, and a flashing magnificence of eye, the glow must be tempered to the mood of tenderness, and sympathy, and mild solicitude. I was deeply anxious for his leg. I could never blame myself too much. Should I ever be forgiven it?

I was forgiven now, he told me, and when I asked him in what manner, his answer was:

"All my animosity is slain by your sweet, kind sighs, my dearest lady."

Here was a sufficient gallantry, I thought, and noted, too, that a special warmth was come into his tone. There was a bottle and a glass against his elbow, and he drained a bumper to my eyes, while I sat listening to the whistling of the wind.

'Twas a wild night of the late November. You could hear the branches rock before the gale: the cold groanings of the blast among the crazy walls and chimneys, its shriekings in the open park, the sounds that fluttered strangely from the ivy, and, most of all, the sudden comings of the rain and hail as it crashed upon the window-panes. I stirred the fire up and made the flames leap, and contrived, as I bent across the hearth to do this, to restore a detached curl to its right condition on my brow.

"A stormy night and wintry"—I shivered as I spoke—"and that poor lad, that fugitive, hiding in it for his life."

While I uttered this, I could so clearly see the shaking trees and the wind-swept wolds cuddling together in the cold that I think the wildness of the elements was echoed in my voice.

"Madam," says the Captain, turning on me a solemn, weary face that was full of instant sadness, "you and I do ill to be together. Madam, I have my duty to perform, and as that duty is cruelly opposed to your desires and must prejudice your peace, Madam, I ask you how I can possibly perform it if you sit there so friendly in the kindness of your heart? Madam, you forget that when the best is said of me I am but a man, and, maybe, not a very strong one, and that so long as

you sit there by the fire to cheer me in my pain, I am in the presence of a divinity whose look it is the law."

"You wish me to withdraw, sir?" says I, regretfully and meekly; and, though I was never better complimented, I pretended to be hurt. Therefore, I rose suddenly upon his words.

"The King's commission would be safer," he replied.

"I know it would," says I, "and by that token am I going to stay. A rebel, Captain, snaps her fingers at the King."

Thereupon I as suddenly sat down. But none the less I admitted the prudence and foresight of the Captain; also thought his situation was a pretty one. He knew the weakness of his heart and the imminence of his duty, and that in my humble person he had found a most determined enemy to both. He was in my toils, indeed, nor must I loose a single bond ere the pressure had been applied, and his will had been bent to my devices.

Therefore, with gentle smiles I played him. Tender was my interest in his mental state and physical; deplored as deeply his splintered limb as his heart's disturbance; and wore an ingenious air of sympathy, both for him and for myself, that I should have unwittingly conferred such pain upon an unoffending gentleman.

"My dear Captain, had I only known," says I, "I would neither have bestowed a pistol on a prisoner nor a glance upon yourself."

"I cannot say which has wrought the greater havoc," says the Captain, lifting up his painful face.

"Sir, you can, I think," says I, gazing at him with my brightest eyes.

He admitted the witchery of them, for he laughed and dropped his own.

"True," he sighed. "God help me!"

"This is no particular season for your prayers," I answered softly, and sighed much the same as he. "Am I so much a devil then, or to be avoided like one? Had you been a brother I could not deplore your accident more tenderly."

"No, no; not that," says he.

"Perhaps, sir, you will explain?" says I, in full enjoyment of his uneasiness.

"I am afraid of liking you too well," he rejoined, with the soldier's bluntness. The prisoner's escape, I ought to tell you, had killed the fop.

"That all?" I exclaimed in sweet surprise. "Dear, dear! liking me too well—how singular!"

"Alas, too well!" he echoed, with a great appearance of high feeling, "for would you have me false to the King and to myself?"

"Oh, politics!" I laughed, but noted that damp beads were come upon the Captain's forehead. "And my dearest man," I added, "you behold in me the most harmless being—I that cannot suffer a rebel to be hanged—the most artless, harmless creature I assure you."

Poor wretch! I saw him wriggle in his bonds. 'Twas a very futile effort, as now I had drawn the cords so tight about him that he was laid submissive as a sheep. To-night, I think, a marble statue could not have resisted the appealing brightness of my

eyes. They never were more cordial, more alluring, more perilous to the soul of man. Therefore, in one short hour the Captain was undone. His resolution was being gradually beaten, as I could plainly tell, and I felt grim satisfaction stiffen me, as I settled myself cosily within the warmth, and prepared a reception for my prey.

I have said that it was a loud night of winter, and the wind crying from the east; now screaming in the chimneys, now rattling the panels and the casements, now calling with its ghostly voices away there in the wood. It was a night for adventure, and Captain Grantley fortified himself with wine, because he was about to embark on one, and that the most perilous.

The Captain's fair companion was wonderfully kind. He noted it, and took it as a confirmation of his late opinions. Now and then she was something more than kind, and on the strength of that he toasted her, while she hinted that she was not displeased. Presently she drew her chair ten inches nearer to him, and soon tongues and hearts were most harmoniously flowing. Outside, the wind was ever rising, and sometimes it cast gusts of smoke down the wide chimney, and as it poured into the room the lady would shiver with sweet exaggeration and denounce the horrid north.

"Had she quite regretted her journey to the north?"

"Yes, but for one circumstance."

"And what was that, if she would deign to forgive his importunity?"

"She had met a soldier at her country-house."

It was not delicate, it was characteristic, it was the sort of thing only my Lady Barbara could say; but Captain Grantley would have burnt his leg rather than it should have been unsaid. This was but the first of many speeches that astonished and delighted him. To-night, the lady was never more certain of herself, nor was the Captain ever less so. Inch by inch the unwilling victim was lured to his doom.

Presently a servant brought in his supper on a tray that gleamed with damask and silver dishes. Under her ladyship's permission he ate and drank, but every minute his gaze was straying to his dangerous companion, whose little shoes were toasting on the hearth. Many moments of that depressing day his mind had been for her. Some bright, brave gesture jumped up from his bosom to his eyes; a word, a smile, a tone, her charming indignation, her lovely anger against himself and politics, her frank impertinence, her amazing candour, and above all, her apartness from the common herd of women—elegant, but featureless. To be explicit, that was how she held poor man. A woman quite unlike her sisters, yet as feminine as anything that ever fibbed and trailed a petticoat. The lords of creation mostly deign to take us women to themselves the moment they can be persuaded that they have caught an entirely new variety. The principle is similar to the one we work upon when we wear a new brocade, or the newest hat with feathers on. If one meets Mrs. Araminta flaunting in the same, one pulls it off and promptly, and bestows it on one's maid. And had

my Lady Barbara reminded Captain Grantley, though never so remotely, of the worthy lady of his friend, Major Blunder of the Blues, or of any other female whatsoever, he would have seen her at the devil rather than he would have wooed her, and callow Cornet Johnson could have had her for the asking. But a certain originality of artifice grafted on a spontaneity of nature, and Bab Gossiter contrived to be just herself, and not to be mistaken for any other creature, and was coveted accordingly by the vanity of every bachelor in the town of London.

Thus with Captain Grantley. In his time the dear man had had a large experience of women. Some, maybe, he had seen more statuesque, more goddess-like, more rigidly and correctly beautiful, yet never one quite so much herself, so entirely herself, so open yet so elusive, so quick, so captivating. As the evening went, as the board was cleared, and the Captain's words grew warmer, their talk competed in its energy with the animated winds that struck the windows.

"Now sir, tell me of these barbarous politics," she commanded, like one who only knows obedience.

"Nay, dear lady, tell me of your own," says he.

Strange how she was fired by his words! He saw her colour glow and burn, and the lamps in her eyes were lit.

"My father is my politics," says she.

The captain could not have recoiled more palpably had a live coal cracked out of the blaze and dropped upon his hand.

"Ha!" he breathed, "your father!"

"Sir, they will imprison him; and when they do, they will imprison this very heart of mine. Perhaps, sir, you never knew a father, perhaps you never loved a father, perhaps you never saw a father's honourable silver hairs. Sir, they will imprison him; and when they do, life will be all empty to me." The lady fell into a sudden weeping. The sobs shook her as a reed. And though she fought with all her handkerchief against the slow but certain tears, they crept down to her powder, and so gravely furrowed it that afterwards she shrank the farther in the shade.

But through a convenient interval of cambric this distressed daughter intently marked the Captain's face. The good man had been long apprenticed to the sword and to the world, but sure the lady's agonies did move him.

"Tell me," he said, "what I can do? What is my power? I am but a servant of the King. Madam, do you think it is my pleasure to put you in such pain? Madam, I am but a menial, a tool. I am not the law by which you suffer, and if I were, do you suppose I would not let it spare you?" There was a fine indignant sternness in the man that made the lady tremble. Yet she exulted too, for Captain Grantley was steadily ripening to the deed exacted of him. In confidence, however, I had better tell you that this incorrigible Bab Gossiter, like the naughty child she was, was playing with a fire, and in the sequel which she is pledged to presently set forth, you shall be told how badly that fire burnt the lovely, heedless fool.

CHAPTER XII.

I DEFY DEAR LADY GRIMSTONE.

IT was a late hour when the lady apparently exposed her soul. She had not one to expose, it is true, but the Captain was deluded into thinking that she had, and persuasion is more powerful than fact. Her father was her blood, her breath; his honour was her own. The Captain gave her the humble admiration of a soldier. Daughters of this mould, who could worship a parent in this manner, must always command the tender reverence of one whose dream was to be the diligent servant of his country. He was also touched. Men of the sword are very human, he informed her. It was a relief, she replied, to have that on such eminent authority, because, to avenge the joyous escapade of an innocent girl, a soldier had proposed to treat her venerable sire with a brutality that was incredible. She did not refine her language to his delicate ear. How could she, being moved so deeply? Did not her lips twitch with feeling, her eyes flash with passion? Alas the Captain! He might have seen "the drums and tramlings of three conquests," but, being human, could he resist her generous anguish, her lovely indignation? Nay, he swore it, he was pained for her as deeply as ever she was for her father. But the word "avenge" he resented sternly.

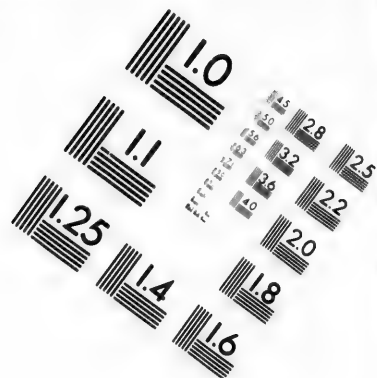
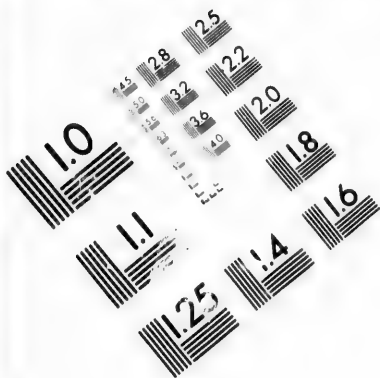
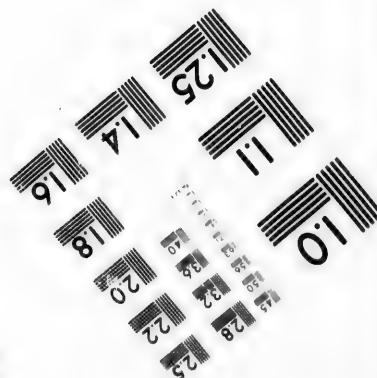
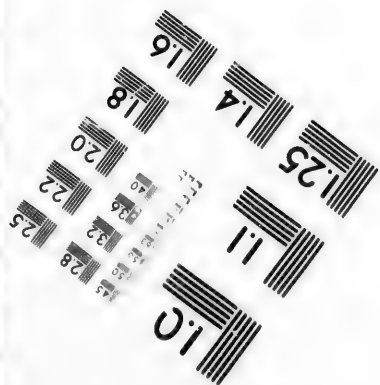
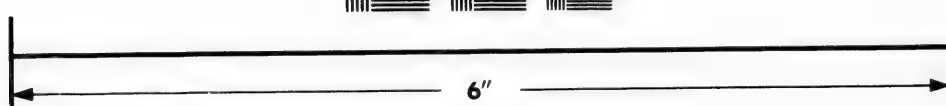
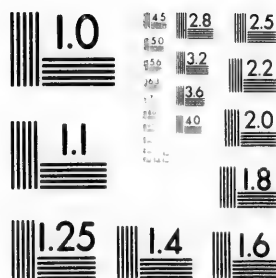
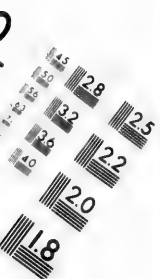


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"Madam, I say again, I am not the law. I am merely the puppet who obeys it."

"Must he obey it then?" Madam tapped a satin shoe quite loud upon the hearth-tiles.

"I hold a commission; I am but a puppet," groaned the Captain, with cheeks of the colour of the damask at his side.

"A puppet!" She rose a queen, and cast the phrase upon him. "A puppet! Then, sir," demanded she, "do you suppose I can afford to lavish my precious hours upon a puppet?"

An excellent tactician, she swept from the room, offended and imperious, without condescending to receive his tremulous reply. In her wisdom she knew this to be the proper moment to withdraw. The Captain had been carried by easy stages to a sufficient harmony of heart. This final discord must jangle in his finest nerves for many hours, set his teeth on edge, and keep him fretful. The lady calculated that he would not shut his eyes that night. He had been given a sight of happiness, that he might know how much he stood to lose.

My train was laid then. Let a spark fall from my eyes to-morrow, and I did not doubt it, it would blow his duty to the devil. One learns to read the symptoms that precede explosion. Leaving the Captain I tripped to the card-players on my lightest toe. My heart accorded with my step. The trio were now at commerce; and such a handsome heap of coins was piled before Miss Prue that the guinea I had lent her to begin with appeared magnified into a dozen.

"Bab," says she, turning to me with a pretty eagerness. "I am remarkably in luck. I have turned the ace up five times running—and my conscience, here it is the sixth!"

It was midnight now, and the hour for retirement. The suite of chambers in the south wing were happily at my disposal. One room commanding the park had been aired during the day by my direction, to be in readiness that night for the masquerader. He was conducted to it now by Mrs. Emblem and myself, and was given much instruction in the treatment of his femininity. Two new morning dresses of my own were hung up in his wardrobe; a pot of rouge and a whole armoury of weapons of the toilet were put against his mirror; and such a quantity of advice was strewn upon him touching his carriage and behaviour on the morrow, that he began to yawn in a most abominable manner, and declared I was too earnest in this mummery.

"Mummery," says I, "you are playing for your life that's all, my bravo."

"*My* life, yes," says he; "but that is my affair entirely. Have you not said that a beggar with bare elbows is no more to be considered than is a farthing candle by a person of condition like yourself?"

Mrs. Emblem saw the cunning laugh lurking in his eye and the smile that trickled over his lower lip when he said this, and looked at me with a face of inquiring innocence, as though the lad had been speaking Greek and would my superior

education be kind enough to supply the meaning for her. At a second glance I perceived that the expression of her countenance corresponded pretty nearly with his own. This made me angry. Here was tacit understanding and conspiracy, with secret mirth beneath it. I could have borne this easily—nay, was always blithe to take my share in such spicy sport when able, and enjoy a laugh at others with the best. But this impudent pair were laughing at *me*. Yes, I felt genuinely angry.

"Very true," says I, "you are indeed a beggar with bare elbows. And being that, it is a pity you should evince such a disposition to forget it."

"My dear madam, the fault is yours I think," says he. "For if you will have as much anxiety for my well-being as you would have were I the Cham of Tartary or some other three-tailed bashaw of high birth, merit, and authority, even a beggar will be led in time to presume upon it and forget the humility of his mansion."

"Would you taunt me then with my gentle-hearted nature, that permits me to look as kindly on the mean and low as on the noble and exalted?"

"Was my Lady Barbarity ever taunted with her gentle-hearted nature?"

It was so difficult to have the laugh of him, that I began to admire the agility with which he generally contrived to have the laugh of me. The fact was that the rogue had an instinct that penetrated much too far. He knew better than I could tell him that he had caught a gaily-painted

butterfly and had stuck it on a pin. His wanton fingers itched to twirl that pin, to remind, I suppose, the gaudy flimsy creature of its strange captivity.

"Bab," Miss Prue says as I was about to retire to my chamber, "your papa trusts that I shall spend not less than a month at Cleebly. When he said that your aunt seemed to grow uneasy in her soul."

"Poor auntie," I says sympathetically; "but Prue, I hope you know what a wretch you are? And the way you eat is positive immodesty. My aunt observed it. As for the way in which you played his lordship, it was too notorious for words. My aunt observed that also. In fact, in half an evening you have so stabbed the dear creature through her sex, that she will ne'er forgive you for it."

"Pray recite my errors," says he, flinging himself into an arm-chair, and stretching out his legs and crumpling his petticoats. "Your voice is so musical it will send me to sleep as promptly as a powder."

He shut his eyes at this and dropped his chin upon his necklace. Nodding to Mrs. Polly I went off to my dressing-room, followed by the maid. But on opening the door to step from one chamber to the other, we heard plain sounds of feet across the corridor and the rustle of departing draperies. 'Twas too dark to distinguish anything, and though we promptly went in the direction of the noise, the cause of it was under cover before we could in any way detect it.

Now I was certain that a spy had been set upon us, and peradventure we had been overheard. Could anyone have listened at the door? 'Twould be fatal had they done so. The masquerader had by no means conducted his share of the conversation in a Prue-like voice ; besides, the discussion of certain matters and its general tenour would be quite enough for any eavesdropper to put a name upon the lady's true identity. Our carelessness had been indeed of the grossest sort ; we had not restrained ourselves with one precaution. Low tones, an occasional eye upon the door, the selection of a proper topic, and there had been nought to fear from anybody. But as it was we were probably undone. Our own incaution was indeed bitterly to blame. In my chamber I let Emblem see the darkness of the whole affair, and gave her freely of my fears ; also scolded her so sharply for our accident that the frightened fool began to weep like anything. But there was one point in her behaviour that both pleased and annoyed me. When I told her that if it was verily a spy who had been at the keyhole our sprightly Prue would dance at Tyburn shortly, Mrs. Polly gave a little gasp and a little cry, let fall the hair-brush she was wielding on my head, and burst out in new tears, while her cheeks turned to the colour of my shoulders.

"Oh, your la'ship!" she blubbered with a deal of tragicality, "say not so."

"Simpleton," says I, sternly. "I shall begin to think you regard this beggar — this rebel — this

adventurer—almost like a brother if you so persistently bear yourself in this way when I mention quite incidentally, as it were, his proper and natural destination."

"He hath most lovely eyes, your ladyship," says she, and wept more bitterly.

"Ods-body! you are not so far wrong there," says I, turning a sigh into a yawn adroitly. "Hath he kissed you yet?"

"Once, I think, ma'am," she answers, with a modest rose appearing through her pallor.

"Hath he an opinion of you, then, or was it pastime, merely?"

"'A told me I was kissable," says she, "a pretty downcast sort of wench, your la'ship, and swore upon his beard that if he came out of this predicament with his heart still underneath his chin he'd the best half of his mind to marry me."

Here the hussy sighed so desperately from the full depth of her bosom that a spasm was provoked within my own. To allay that pain I took the lovesick Mrs. Emblem by the arm and pinched her till she forgot her heart-ache in one that was less poetical.

Retiring to my earned repose, I found sleep at first as coy as she is in town. For half-an-hour I thought on the impudence of my maid, for another half on the folly of myself.

"Bab," I soliloquised at the end of an hour's meditation on this entertaining theme, "you should be whipt through every market town in Yorkshire. You are worse than an incorrigible rogue, you are

an incorrigible fool; but any way at nine o'clock to-morrow morning you shall dismiss Mrs. Polly Emblem without a character."

Had it not been that I had ratafia to compose me I doubt whether I should have had any sleep at all. The fear of discovery lay upon me like a stone. I was persuaded that we had been spied upon. Slumber, however, mercifully drew a curtain round the miserable consequences embodied in the future.

Emblem's light hand woke me.

"Ten o'clock, your la'ship," says she.

The red sun was in a station over the tree-tops in the east, and sent cold rays across the winter vapours of the park through one corner of my window. I sipped my chocolate, and hoped the rebel was not abroad yet.

"He is," the maid said; "nought would restrain him. At seven o'clock he knocked me up and made me get him towels and cold water for his tub; at eight o'clock, my lady, he made me paint his face, friz his hair a bit, put his headdress on, and arrange all the points in what he called his 'feminine machinery'; at nine he was drinking ale and eating of his breakfast; and ten minutes since I saw him in the morning room teaching my Lady Grimstone's polly-parrot to swear like anything."

"Oh," says I, "a very pretty occupation to be sure. Here, girl, put me in my *deshabille*, and let me be upon him ere he's at a further mischief. Quick, wench, or next we shall have him teaching hymns to my papa."

Half-an-hour hence I went downstairs to keep a personal eye upon him. I had not been there five minutes when my aunt's maid, Tupper, came in and said that her mistress required my presence in her room immediately. As the message was so peremptory I dallied some five-and-twenty minutes longer than I need, for I think that persons of an elderly habit should never be encouraged in their arbitrary courses. Had I only foreseen what lay in store when I obeyed this summons, I should have taken my muff and tippet with me to protect myself from frostbite. You may have seen an iceberg clad in all its severities of snow, sitting in a temperature that makes you shiver. If you have had this felicity you have also seen my aunt, the dowager, this wintry morning. She smiled a December sun-glint when she saw me.

"Barbara, good morning," she began.

"Good morning, ma'am," says I, and curtsied.

"I trust you are very well," my aunt says.

"Very well indeed, ma'am," I answered modestly. I'll confess a little nerve-twitch. 'Twas a charming idiosyncrasy of my aunt's that she only betrayed an interest in one's health when she was about to administer a pill of one sort or another. She was about to administer one just now—a blue one!

"I have sent for you, Barbara," says the dowager, in shivery thin tones that were like cold water trickling down one's spine, "to inform you that your dear friend, Miss Prudence Canticle, your ownest Prue, the dearest Prue that every was, the precious Prue,

to whom all the world is but as a china teacup, is just a man, and a very pretty scoundrel."

An elderly lady of six-and-fifty winters, whose face is Arctic, and is framed, moreover, in corkscrew curls that look horribly like icicles, can throw an extraordinary stress and feeling in the mild word, "man." And this instant, such an amount did my aunt employ that a feather might have knocked me down.

"Shall I tell you this man's name?" the pitiless dowager inquired.

In assent I bowed my head.

"Anthony Dare," says she with unction; "escaped rebel, who is to be hanged as a common malefactor."

"Yes, aunt, Anthony Dare," says I; "and 'tis all very true, except in the main particular. He is not to be hanged as a common malefactor."

"Indeed," says she. "But that is the Government's disposition, I understand."

"I do not deny that it is the Government's disposition, ma'am, but 'tis not the disposition of your niece, Bab Gossiter."

"You are the law then, Barbara?"

"Nine-tenths of it," says I.

"Assertion will be a proof when assumption becomes a claim," says my sententious relative.

"Possession is allowed to be nine-tenths of it," says I; "and certainly I have possession of this most charming prisoner."

"A very temporary one," my aunt says. "'Tis my duty to advise my brother of this matter; and

he will hold it his to acquaint Captain Grantley and other interested persons."

"That is as may be," says I calmly, "for I think that on reflection, my dearest aunt, you will do nothing of the kind."

"So and indeed!" cries my aunt in an awful voice. "Barbara, this is gross—this is impertinence."

"It may be both, dear aunt," says I, "or it may be neither, but its truth, I know, and that I'll swear to."

"Defend my virtue!" cried my aunt; "this is beyond all suffering."

The iceberg strove to freeze me with her eye. And perhaps she would have done it too, only that a bright idea took me at the moment and armed me with new brazenness. My masters of the other sex, if you would bend us to your will, do it with audacity. No palterings, no if-you-pleases, no apostrophes. Big, bullying Coercion does our business. Swear by your beards and the god of thunder, and none of us shall say you nay, for there is not a petticoat among us can resist you. This method, then, I clapped upon my aunt, and now look you to the sequel.

"The matter is just this, dear aunt," says I. "What about prim old Dame Propriety? I would have you think of her, dear aunt. There is not a female of us all can afford to disregard her."

I pinned such a steady eye upon my aunt that shortly her high look drooped and was replaced by an ugly one of baffled rage. How fortunate I had

ingenuity enough to hold that cat's paw! 'Twould have scratched me else, and badly.

"What will the world say, auntie dear?" I asked. "A word of this in town and the particular family to which you have the condescension to belong will be derided by the world. My Lady Clapper will live upon it for a fortnight. Your very dear friend, Mrs. Saywell, will dispense it regularly with her new bohea and dish it up hotter than her muffins, and feed every insatiable maw in Mayfair on it. Nor will they find it indigestible as her buttered crumpets either. A word, dear aunt, and the whole bench of Bishops will preach a sermon on it, and send all your presentation stoles and slippers back greatly discoloured with their tears. We shall be afflicted with the exultation of our enemies and, worse a hundred times, the commiseration of our friends. Will you not reflect, dear auntie?"

For the dear lady to reflect was quite unnecessary. Instinct was sufficient to decide her. She was as likely to rouse good Dame Propriety, or to make her family the source of common conversation, as she was to sit in a pew with a hassock in it, or to listen to a Low Church clergyman.

The countenance of my aunt was something to be seen. Rage laid her livid; but I was almost proud to look at her, for was she not bred so properly that she smiled away like anything? She put her teeth hard upon her lips, and so did bar her anger back, and continued in that pleasant face that cooled my blood by three degrees.

"Very well, Barbara," says she, without the

faintest passion, though it had required several seconds to give her this composure, "very well. But if I outlast the century I will not overlook this monstrous conduct. From to-day I disinherit you. And I may say that one portion of my fortune will be diverted into building and endowing a church at St. Giles's in the Fields; the other portion to provide a sanctuary for needy gentlewomen."

Somewhere in the middle of the day I thought the hour a chosen one to finish off the Captain. With such an application had I pursued the gallant man the previous evening, and such his frame of mind, that surely he was suffering even now an ecstasy of sweet pain. Another amorous glance or two would certainly complete him and drown his duty in his desperation. These reflections carried me to the library door. On entering I was met by the Captain's greetings and the presence of an unpropitious third. Corporal Flickers was in an ostentatious occupation of my seat against the fire-place.

"When you are alone, sir, I shall be glad to speak with you," I said, this being a hint for the dismissal of the Corporal.

"Important business occupies me most unfortunately just now," the Captain said; and I retired to await his disengagement.

I conceived this to be perhaps the matter of an hour, but never was more faulty in my reckoning. At three o'clock I sent to inquire of his convenience. 'Twas not yet, however, as the Corporal was with him still; moreover, said the Captain in reply, he was like to be so until far into the evening. At supper-

time they were together also. On Emblem looking farther in the matter, she learned that at the request of the Captain the Corporal had been served with food there.

We were discussing this strange affair in the privacy of my boudoir, when Mr. Anthony, whose fund of shrewdness served him in a thousand ways, advanced a theory meriting much consideration.

"Flickers is his body guard," says he, "Grantley knows it's in your mind to captivate him, and fears you'll do it too, if you so much as have him to yourself. Flickers is for safety, and you can take my word for that."

I thought upon this sadly; for if this was so and the coward's trick was only persevered in, I should be completely foiled, and that blue paper must be in London very soon.

"You are wrong, Prue," I said, rebelling against my better judgment. "A soldier and a man like Grantley would never have such cowardice."

"Bab," says he, with insolence, "I'll bet my back hair on it that I'm right. The bravest man that ever trod will take to strange shifts when confronted with the devil. Pity Grantley, do not blame him."

Of such is the sympathy of boys!

CHAPTER XIII.

I DISPLAY MY INFINITE RESOURCES.

THE morrow was full of anxiety and incident. There was a skirmish with my aunt—a diversion to be sure, but one of peril. There was also my distrust. I was compelled to keep an unceasing eye on Mr. Anthony, on Mrs. Emblem, on the soldiers, on my Lady Grimstone, on Captain Grantley and the document he held, and most of all on my own susceptibilities. There was here plenty of material for mischief. The conduct of the Captain was abominable. Of the six troopers quartered on us, five were despatched at daybreak to scour the surrounding country for the rebel; the remaining one, the Corporal, was retained in the library to protect his commanding officer from the wiles of woman. Never a doubt that Mr. Anthony had spoken true, and that this prudent cowardice had struck my only weapon from my hand. Only one means could save his lordship now—the sacrifice of the poor young fugitive.

I suppose it is the curse of persons of condition that the sword of pride swings above their heads, suspended tenderly on a single hair. The first breath of calumny brings it down. The Government had merely to receive the paper setting forth what

was said to be his lordship's part in the prisoner's escape, and ignoring all other consequences, not the least would be the hawking of his name in every filthy print of Fleet Street. It would be extremely difficult to bear. Yet bear it I must, and perchance his committal to the Tower, and divers horrid businesses, unless the lad was betrayed to his enemies at once.

However, I did not consider that harsh alternative. I could not apply it an I would. But something must be done, as the Captain took occasion to remind me. On the evening of the sixth day he sent this polite missive to my room.

"Madam,—To-morrow evening the term expires. Unless the rebel is discovered to me by the hour of six in the afternoon, my duty will compel me to acquaint His Majesty's Government of the whole affair. Madam, I pray you in your own interest to consider deeply of your course, for I am persuaded that you have a knowledge of the rebel's whereabouts. Let me remind you that the consequences must be inevitably of great prejudice to the Earl, your father, if you permit this matter to proceed.—I have, Madam, the honour to be your duteous, humble servant, J. Grantley."

Miss Prue was sitting at my tea-table when I read this; and this keen observer saw me grow red with passion at its contents.

"From a dear friend, I'll bet a shilling," he confided to a teacup.

"Very," says I, crumpling up the Captain's insolence and throwing it in the grate; and added, "Prue, you must excuse me for five minutes; I must see that dear friend of ours the Captain on something of importance."

"The Captain!" says he, all attention.

I was too pre-occupied to heed him in anyway whatever, and foolishly repaired to the library without troubling to set at rest any suspicion of the facts he might entertain. I found the Captain and his body-guard the Corporal playing backgammon and smoking the horriddest tobacco that ever did offend me.

"Your pardon, gentlemen," says I, "and as you are at such an important matter, 'twere best that I withdraw perhaps."

The Captain put his pipe down and begged me to be seated, while the Corporal, evidently acting under orders, rose, stepped to the door, but did not go outside.

"Sir," I began, "I am come to ask you again to revise that paper. I will not have his lordship saddled with a misdemeanor which he never did commit. 'Twas I that set the rebel free, and 'tis I that will abide the consequence."

The Captain grimly shook his head.

"My dear lady," he replied, "it cannot be. Your father is morally responsible for the crime that hath been wrought in his house against the King. You must either produce me the prisoner to-morrow by the hour of six, or submit his lordship to the severe alternative."

"Captain, this is an absurdity," says I tartly; "and

to be brief, sir, your conversation seems extremely like a simpleton's. Produce you the prisoner? Ods my life, what a folly do you talk! Ask me to produce you the devil, and I shall produce him just as easily."

"Not a doubt about it," says the Captain laughing at the anger in my eyes.

Before I could retort upon him, my attention was distracted by the sudden opening of the door. To my horror I saw the apparition of the rebel. His mouth was stern, and there was a high sparkle in his eyes. One glance and I read all the contents of his mind. By some strange means he had discovered the dilemma I was in, and to spare me the inconvenience that I suffered had come to deliver his person up to justice. His purpose was distinctly written in his face.

It was a terrible instant, and only a wonderful decision could stave off fatality. I sprang up and sailed towards him ere he could speak the word that would betray him, and pushed him by main force past the Corporal, and over the threshold of the door.

"Oh Prue, you prying rogue!" I cried laughing with a heartiness that was intended to be heard. "You spy, you suspicious wretch, you are dying I can see to get an inkling of this matter; but I'll stake my soul that you do not overhear a word."

I had no sooner expelled him from the room with this peremptory mirth, than I whispered feverishly in his ear:

"For God's sake do not do it now! Go back to my room, and I will follow and talk the matter over."

Thereupon I boldly rejoined the Captain and the Corporal, and slapped the library door in the face of the prisoner standing on the mat. The suspicions I had aroused by a course so strange must be soothed at any cost. Unlimited lying came greatly to my aid. I ordered the puzzled Corporal to turn the key upon the lady.

"She is just burning with curiosity," I laughed; "but I'll take care that she shall not satisfy it."

'Twas a mercy that the Captain's leg was in such a posture, that his back was to the door, and though he must have heard sounds of a woman's entrance, and that I was in a flutter of one kind or another, and had been excited to strange steps, he could not possibly have seen Miss Prue, and happily his injury forbade him turning round to look. Again, the Corporal was of such a primitive intelligence that he never suspected anything at all. Finding the Captain as resolute as ever, I took an early chance to quit the arbitrary wretch, and sought the rebel.

His appearance in the library was simple to explain. He had got a hint of my predicament, and to relieve me was ready to sacrifice himself. He was in my room awaiting me. Entering, I closed the door, turned the key and put it in my pocket.

"Would you spoil all, then?" I bitterly began.

"You have told lies," says he in his coarse fashion.

"For you," says I, swiftly.

My look caused the deepest tawny to creep into his face.

"You swore upon your oath," says he, "that to harbour me would place you in no danger. Madam, you have lied."

"I shall be glad for you to prove that," I answered languidly.

I should have been inclined to enjoy his anger and his insolence I think, had there not been a note of warning in his tone that frightened me. That he had made his mind up on this point was very plain.

"I will prove it in three words," says he. "First I read the paper you crumpled up and cast into the grate. My other information I have pulled out of Mrs. Polly Emblem."

"Oh, the wretched wench!" cries I, and summoned her from my dressing-room immediately.

The fool came as limp as rags, and cowered from my anger pitifully.

"If you please, your la'ship," she whimpered, "'a fairly tore it from my breast. I could not help myself, my lady — 'deed I couldn't — that's a fact."

"You silly trout, I've a mind to boil you, and that's another fact. But no, you half-wit, it were better to dismiss you on this instant. Off, you slut, and pack your boxes and do not offend me with your face another hour."

"Oh please, please my lady," sobbed the simpleton falling on her knees.

"Enough of this Bab," says Miss Prue sternly, with a fine indignation in her eyes. "Leave the poor creature be. She says she couldn't help her-

self, and I am here to vouch it. I fetched it out of her like anything, for she's but a woman after all. Bab, drop it; do you hear me?"

The rogue slapped his hand upon the table with the grandeur of an emperor. Thereupon I rated her the more soundly for her fault. The miserable Emblem first looked at her champion and then at me in the most piteous manner. Thereat Miss Prue's countenance became a blaze of anger.

"Damn it, Bab," says she, "if you only were a man!"

In the effort to contain her wrath she went striding up and down the room. Suddenly she dealt a vicious kick at a Sheraton what-not inlaid with pearl, that was worth as much as the blood-money on her head, brought it down in pieces, and smashed to atoms a priceless china vase. Then she turned on me.

"Bab, you are a perfect brute!" and then said to Emblem softly, "Poor wench! But don't you fret, my dear, for I will see you are not hurt."

Having delivered his mind thus freely, he strode to the door and tried it.

"No, boy, you don't," says I, and ran to the door the other side of the chamber that led into my dressing-room. Hastily I secured that also, and took the custody of the key.

"Now sit down," I did command him; "for I am to have a talk with you, my friend."

"I hope you will enjoy it," he said, "as it is to be the last."

"Surely," says I, "you cannot have the folly to

be resolute in this? Would you yield your life up for a whim? Doth not your very soul turn dark at the thought of death—and such a death?”

I shivered as I spoke, and the lad turned paler.

“No,” says he, “that is—at least,” he dropped his tone, “I do not think about it.”

“You will have to do,” I answered, with the slow unction of a priest. “And you so full of lusty youth. Do I not see health sparkling in your eyes? The world must be lovely to you, I am certain. Your heart is fed on sunshine, and the singing of the birds is the only sound you hear. And are there no ambitions in you? Have you never dreamt of glory?”

He turned still paler at this speech, and a sort of grim joy took hold of me when I saw how my unaccustomed gravity was sinking in his mind.

“But you?” he said.

“I am not to be regarded. I have less to lose than you. Life itself in your case; in mine only a new story for the town.”

“Do you forget that they can attain you of high treason?” he replied. “And that would mean a long imprisonment, and you would find it a tedious and very weary thing. I know, for I have tried it.”

“High treason—imprisonment!” says I; “these are bogies for a child. Politics are wonderful affairs, but if they can clap Bab Gossiter in the ‘Jug’ and diet her on bad bread and dirty water, let ’em do it, boy, by every means, and I’ll admire ’em for it.”

“But if they threaten others?” he replied. “For instance, your papa, the Earl.”

"Ho, ho, ho!" I laughed; but in my breast there was no levity. "A peer of the realm!"

"He is not to blame for being that," he answered, slyly, "and they will not the less respect him for it I am sure. And what of Derwentwater, Kenmare, Nithsdale in the late rebellion?"

Being properlyhipped on this, I tried new tactics.

"Ah, I see," says I, "you wish to play at Hero, do you? Want a pretext to make the world ring by your devotion to a lady's little finger. A truce, boy, to these palpable devices."

He coloured high. Ridicule is the sovereign remedy for poetic notions in the young. He merely sniffed my black draught, however, and flung it from him.

"Very shrewd of you," says he, "but I never was afraid of being laughed at."

I turned to Emblem with a frank amazement.

"Go you for a bodkin, girl, and I will prick him with it, for I would fain discover if this child of ours is actually made of blood and flesh. Not afraid of being laughed at!"

Straight I fell into a peal to prove how monstrously he lied. He chewed his lip, and struggled to cover up his very evident vexation.

"Sneer," says he, with anger darting from his eyes, "but my determination's taken. A week ago I swore that a single hair of my Lady Barbara should not suffer for her mercy. And when I make an oath I keep one, whatever others do."

He rose. A glance assured me that he was in an ugly mood of heroism. He held his hand out

for the key. I glanced into his face, saw all the muscles in it tight, and his mouth locked in a silence that seemed to render the gravest word ridiculous.

"Oh come," I cries, "enough of claptrap! Have I done all this to be thwarted by a child? Do you not see if you persevere in this proud folly, that the Captain triumphs? And I, a victorious rebel, should find it easier far to endure the Tower than the humiliations of defeat."

"Alas! these palpable devices," he sighed. "But it's the key I want, not trickeries."

Again I had a taste of my impotence with him. Hitherto my lightest whim was a law for the greatest or the meanest; this moment though, a very beggar defied my imperious command. Nor would he budge from this perverseness. Pretty soon his intolerable behaviour made my anger rise. It was increased when I remembered his utter dependence and his low condition. And yet I took a kind of admiration of him too. He was so bold, so contradictory, so brazenly impertinent withal, that I began to feel there was more in his sex than I had suspected.

"Child," says I, "I am dreadfully enraged with you and with your ways, but," I added musingly while I read the decision in his face, "do you know I have half a mind to love you for them."

"Pray don't," says he, uneasily.

"I have, though. I think you'll make the prettiest man that ever was. You are not a bit according to the pattern. You appear to even have

a will, a very unusual circumstance in anything that's masculine. Child," I says, "do you know that I have half a mind to make a husband of you? I like you, my lad. You are headstrong, but I think you are a charming boy."

I patted him upon the shoulder with an air of high approval. He knit his teeth, and cried in a crimson heat:

"Confound you, woman, I am not your pussy-cat, nor your King Charles' spaniel."

"No," says I; "and that is why I like you. You are so unstrokeable."

"The key," says he.

"Understand me, sir," says I severely. "If I am ever at all tender to a person, I become very much his friend and delight to serve him. Now I can best serve you by denying you this key. And while we are on this argument I should be glad to ask you whether there is anything you owe me?"

"My life," he answered promptly.

"Very well," says I; "and are you to be so thankless as to throw away that which I have given you?"

"Oh well," says he nervously, and dropped the boldness of his look, "if that is how you put it—but madam for the world I would not have your name imperilled or your father's. Why, 'tis gratitude that makes me so contumacious in this matter."

"Now," says I, "here's something I should like you to reflect upon. I refuse most absolutely to yield up your person to the State. And should

you do this of your own accord I will not forgive you for it; no sir, I will not! And I will not even go to Tyburn to see how prettily you hang. And my vanity will sicken horribly. For in every enterprise I crave to be victorious, and I support a whipping as badly as you do a thoroughly polite behaviour."

"But that paper going south," he put in doggedly.

"Yes, I've thought of that, and it hath occurred to me that if your prayers, Emblem's wit, and my resources cannot play a pretty little trick upon the Captain, the Captain's very wise."

'Twas then Miss Prue did prick her ears up.

"Trick!" says she, "anything daring? Aught with a spice about it? Now Bab, let's have it!"

"It is my intention to kidnap my good friend Corporal Flickers," I replied.

"Kidnap Corporal Flickers," cries he, in a voice of pregnant admiration. "Why, Bab, your heart is big enough for five. Bravo!"

"At six o'clock to-morrow evening he is to take that paper, ride to York, and catch the London mail," says I. "But he will not get beyond our gatehouse, for everything is to be most excellently planned."

"And you will perhaps be wanting my assistance," says he keenly.

"Very probable indeed," says I to pacify him somewhat, though I did not intend to risk his safety in the matter.

Thus by fair words, devices, and appeals he

was prevailed upon to sit in peace, and for the present to let things pursue their courses. Much as I rejoiced in this, however, I was angry with myself for being such a tender sort of fool. For the moment, though, a more instant matter filled my thoughts. Such a nicety of performance was required in this new affair that fearing the least miscarriage, I directed my personal attention to it. Habiting myself for an evening stroll, I stepped into the heavy bitter night, winter though it was, went softly down the drive, and demanded admittance at the gate-house door.

William Goodman was the keeper and lived there, a widower, with John, his son, a sturdy six-foot yokel. They made a pair whom Heaven might have created especially for my business. They sat in the gatehouse kitchen at a meal of beef and ale. William Goodman—sly, ancient, lean—was a man of sense, and proved it by being faithful as a dog to the family he had served for forty years. He had only been once before the Justices, and the occasion was when he had cracked the scone of a man who had contumeliously hinted within William's hearing that my Lord of Long Acre was not so handsome a nobleman as the Duke of Marlborough. After they had received me with the most horrible embarrassment, and Goodman, the younger, had had the misfortune to turn a jug of ale into his lap, I sat down and explained my mission as succinctly as I could.

"Have you a coal-hole under this kitchen?" I began.

"Yes, my lady," said the elder.

"Exactly as I thought," says I. "And suppose a man was put into it; could he very well get out?"

"Depends upon the man, your ladyship," says the elder, leering like a fox.

"One who did not happen to be a friend of the family," says I, mightily enjoying William Goodman's face.

"He might o' course," says he, with his natural caution, "and, o' course, he mightn't; but, my lady, if I was betting on it, I should put my money on he mightn't."

"Well, Goodman," says I, "I should like you to understand that I have put my money on 'he mightn't.' Now there is a certain person to be put into that coal-hole, and out he must not come until I send the order. And let me give you a few particulars."

These were brief and simple. Mr. Flickers must be lured into the gatehouse, sprung upon, taken by surprise, laid in the cellar, and kept there both tight and privy at my pleasure; while I should be pleased if it could be contrived that a blue paper passed from his possession to my own.

"And no unnecessary violence, Goodman. I would not have unnecessary violence for the world. But do you think all this is to be done?"

"Your ladyship can call it done already," Goodman answered. "And what was it, my lady, you thought he called his lordship?"

"Doddering old something, I believe," says I;

"cannot take a Bible oath on the exact text of it, but 'doddering old something' is the very synonym of what he said."

"When the pore man falls, I hope as 'ow he won't fall on his head," says William piously, but with a high significance.

"Now, no unnecessary violence," I said; "but I'll take my life that 'dodder' is the word he used."

There was here a question as to the disposal of his horse. It was resolved to convey it to the High Farm, some miles up the moor, the same evening and hold it there in secret till the time was by for the Corporal's release. And I had such a high regard for Goodman and his son that I did not hesitate to think them the equals of their word. Wherefore I went home to dress in a cheerful mood, and passed a lively evening with my aunt, his lordship, and Miss Prue.

My aunt put me quite remarkably in mind of a ferret held up by the throat. The creature was prepared to bite on the first occasion, only the season was not yet, for to attempt to do so now was to run the risk of having the life choked out of it.

"Aunt," says I, as we sat at supper, "my dearest Prue tells me she must leave us in a day or two."

"Niece," says my aunt politely, "I shall be grieved indeed to forego her charming company."

But here the dowager's steely smile shone out and caught my eye, and—well, I wished it had not done so.

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CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH THE CAPTAIN'S WIT BECOMES A RIVAL
OF MY OWN.

ON the fateful morrow the frost still held, and gave no sign of yielding. The Doctor rode over towards noon to attend the Captain's leg. When he left the library I took his professional opinion on both that member and its owner.

"Doing nicely, very nicely," says the Doctor. "Nor are the injuries as serious as we did at first suppose."

"We shall have him about on crutches in a day or two perhaps?" says I, making a wry face.

"Not this fortnight," says the Doctor, "nay, not this three weeks. This morning now he tried to alter the position of his leg, but it was so stiff and gave the poor man such an excruciating pain, that he desisted the instant he began."

"I was trusting, Doctor," I replied, "that the Captain would have his heels up for at least a month. A man of his activity would benefit by rest."

"Well, my dear lady, let us think about it," says the Doctor.

"And I believe, sir," says I, insinuatingly, "that you had better stay to dinner while you do."

I never remember a day that took longer to consume the sun's light, or a night more tardy to arrive. At five p.m. the Captain scrawled the information: "In an hour, madam, unless a particular circumstance prevents it, my report must be dispatched." And I was grateful to the Captain's air of mystery for causing me to laugh so. "Unless a particular circumstance prevents it." A little after six Emblem bore me the news that the Corporal was mounted and away. As Goodman was to bring me the result as soon as one had been arrived at, I awaited him in privacy, and was so nervous and excited too, that I preferred to have my supper served there, instead of wearing the mask of my habitual indifference, and sitting down with the family as usual.

Seven struck, but no Goodman came. A quarter-past, and I began to speculate upon miscarriages. But presently to my relief, I caught the sound of heavy boots ascending, and on his knock I invited Goodman to come in.

"Well?" says I.

"Under lock and key, your ladyship," says Goodman. "'A kicked a bit, 'a swore a bit, when we took him from behind; but we dropped him in, and slipped the bolt and turned the key; his 'oss has been taken to the farm, and I left John my son a sittin' afore the cellar door a readin' in *The Courier*."

"No unnecessary violence, I hope," says I.

"Not a bit, my lady. But its a mercy that there weren't. He turned rampageous like; but John, my son, had got him by the muffler, and my knee was a kneelin' in the middle of his shirt. We dropped him

in the hole, simple an' easy as a child. He might 'a fell upon his nose, but I judge from the crackin' sort o' sound he made, that it liker was his head. But he'll take no hurt, my lady; no, not he, for that Corp'ral's the toughest tooth that ever chewed up bull-beef."

"And did you abstract the paper?" I inquired.

"Here it is," says he, and gave it to me with a proud appearance.

I dismissed the honest fellow with a purse and a few compliments on his exceptional ability, which even the best of men are greedy to receive; and gave him some instructions touching their captive's entertainment. You may take it that I never was more complacent in any battle than in the signal victory my arms had achieved in this. The Captain's wit might be considerable, but it was indeed a satisfaction to hold the proof that my own resources were, after all, despite my foe's unscrupulosity and keenness, good enough to thwart him. His emissary, his special messenger, his wretched tool, was under lock and key; the dread instrument he had so diligently waved above my head, and had disturbed my dreams with, had not yet reached the Government, but lay upon my writing-table, a prisoner of war. 'Twas a very triumph. I picked up this red-sealed horror and brandished it before the blaze. "The Secretary of State, Whitehall, London." I insulted that elegant inscription in divers ways, but ere I bestowed upon it the crowning indignity of all, its committal to the flames, the whim seized me to read its precious contents once again. Tearing off the cover, I drew

forth four precisely-folded sheets of foolscap. But directly afterwards, I think a feather might have felled me. There was not a word of writing on them !

What could be the meaning? The packet had been sealed implicitly with a great array of wax ; had been addressed in a large, fair hand to the Secretary of State ; had been ravished from the custody of Flickers, yet here it was, blanker than my hand.

I was wholly staggered. Presently I plagued my wits for explanations, but no matter how diligent my mind was it could not override the fact that the letter was empty. Later I took counsel of Mrs. Emblem, but she could merely stare and wag her silly head. On her suggestion, however, I re-summoned William Goodman. He swore an oath that this was the only document on the person of the Corporal. When I pressed him on the point he reluctantly admitted that as they barred the door upon the prisoner after the rape of the packet, he called out to them to this, or similar, effect :

"These dirty doings is all that ladyship o' yours, I know ; but harkee ! just you tell that brazen jade o' yours the Captain's not a fool, the Captain's not, but smart, downright smart, my boys, and laughs at such as her. And tell her she's welcome to the paper, for it's not a bit o' use to her, nor to me, nor to the Captain, and she's welcome to chew it to her supper if she likes ; and you can tell her, boys, that the Captain's laughing at her in his sleeve."

Goodman then withdrew. Turning on Emblem fiercely when he had done so, I cried out in the very extremity of rage :

"Oh, the deep devil! Oh, the cunning, foxey fiend! But, remark me, girl, d'ye hear? I say, remark me, I'll be revenged upon that Captain as I'm a female. I'm resolved upon it, I'll be revenged. Ha! thou ancient enemy, I'll have thee yet, and then I'll twist thee. Ha! I see thee squirming like a lizard in the sun. Thou belly-wriggling snake, I'll pay thee for it. Eve was not my early mamma else! I'll correct thee of these Eden tricks, thou worm, thou abominable night-bite!"

It was the pains of disappointment, combined with the keen thought that, after all, the Captain had occasion for his mockery that whipt me to this transport. The descent from supposition to hard fact was, indeed, most cruel. My pretty schemes, that had been designed to assist young Anthony and show the crafty soldier in a foolish light, where were they now? And the Captain sitting calmly down and laughing to himself at my predicament! Mrs. Polly Emblem had wisely fled the chamber, else I would not have answered for her at that instant.

An hour passed, and I had pulled all the curls out of my hair, and had washed half the powder from my face with weeping, when the door was opened and Mr. Anthony appeared. He looked at me steadily a minute, a deal of criticism in his eye.

"Why, Bab," he cries, "what in the prophet's name's upon you? 'Tis a new rôle, I see. What in the name of mercy is the part? Are you Niobe mourning for her young, or a pale Jocasta, or a drunken baggage that goes too often to the 'Jug?'"

"Out, rogue," says I, "or I will put you out."
 "I see you have already put yourself out," says he. "But what in conscience is the matter?"

"Out, rogue," I repeated. "I will not have your horrid sex intruding on my presence—wretched, crafty, undermining creatures!"

"Faith!" says he, "I've always said it. Wretched, puling, prying rogues. Here, Bab, I'll just unslip these petticoats and will resume the breeches of a man."

"Mention that word again and I'll beat you to a purpose, you insolent slip of beggary."

"Go on, sweet," says he, taking his seat calmly by the fire. "I like it. Your beauty is most monstrous when your eyes blaze. Rat me, if you don't look an accidental angel, darling."

Now, as this audacious rebel sat there laughing quietly in true enjoyment of my rage, I judged it better to restrain it if I could, and tell him of the case. He heard me out with patience, approved heartily of my trick, paid me a compliment on the unscrupulosity of its character, swore I was a cunning one, and so forth; but when I showed him the clean paper with never a written word upon it, he cried: "That beats me!" and grew as thoughtful as an owl.

"Sir Sapience," says I, "I should value your opinion."

"Witchcraft, as I'm a Christian man," says he. "But that Captain is—well, that Captain is—"

"He is, indeed," says I, with a significance not to be conveyed by a mere adjective or noun.

For an hour or more we broke our minds upon this problem. It was the deepest mystery, and of that provoking kind that makes one unhappy till one has solved it. As it would not profit us to keep the Corporal in durance, I judged it right to take measures to release him. But it was certain that as soon as he was at large my guilt would be published to his officer. Therefore I took boldness for my course, and stepped down straightway to the Captain. I carried the blue papers and the mutilated seal with me.

My enemy was alone. He received me with the courtesy that never failed him, while I, with the consideration that was habitual to me, asked politely of his leg.

"Captain," I decisively began, "an accident of a rather serious sort hath happened to that emissary of yours."

"My soul," cries the Captain, anxiously, "is that so? Pray tell me of it, madam."

"I will strike a bargain first," says I, coolly, and cast the papers down before his eyes.

I think I never saw a man so taken.

"Ods wounds!" he cries, "how came these in your custody?"

"An accident hath occurred to that emissary of yours," I repeated, and smiled upon his urgent face, "and you shall hear the details of it on condition that you do confess why this packet is a bogus. I can assure you, Captain, that I am burning to learn the reason for this make-believe."

He tried to hedge at this, and get news of the

Corporal out of me without giving me the secret that I so desired. But if he considered I was a child in these affairs to be evaded lightly he was early undeceived.

"Not a word, not a hint, sir," I says, "until you have told me why you have furnished the Government with such a short account. And I am persuaded, sir, that that Corporal of yours is in the least enviable plight."

My reluctant enemy fenced with me a long half hour, but I was so tenacious of my course, and parried him with such an ease, that in the end I forced him to desist.

"Very well," he said, "I'll tell you, madam. The fact is I have been trying to intimidate you. There has been a conspiracy between his lordship and myself to frighten you into a betrayal of the prisoner. From the first I have been convinced that you could put your hand upon that rebel if you cared; and, my dear lady, it may please you now to know that up to this instant I have not budged one point from that opinion. I am certain that if you chose you could deliver him up to us to-night. Now we let you read the particular narrative that held my lord responsible, and were at pains to cause you to believe that it was going to the Government for the most obvious of reasons. And as you are aware, we have even thought fit to prolong the farce by sending Flickers southward with a bogus packet."

"This is very fine and pat," says I, "and sounds like a peroration; but under your favour,

sir, I should be glad to examine you upon it. Will you tell me, sir, on whom the blame will fall? If it's not to be on me, and not to be upon his lordship, who is going to suffer?"

"Yours to command, James Grantley," the Captain answered, with a grave and happy dignity that sat upon him charmingly, I thought. "Does your ladyship suppose that I am a snivel or a cur? Hath your ladyship formed so kind a judgment of my character as to hold me capable of allowing my friends to suffer rather than myself."

This vindication of himself made him appear so handsome and so lofty, that I felt that this deep enemy of mine had no right to present so excellent a figure. 'Twas palpable, besides, that he could outmanœuvre me in every way, and was therefore a person to be hated.

"Well, Captain," says I reproachfully. "I trust you do repent of the fever you have thrown me in; of the sleepless nights you've given me: of the visions of the Tower with which I have been beset."

"Evildoers," says he, sternly, "must command no sympathy."

"'Tis a hard name, sir," I says.

"Truth, madam, is not a courtier."

"Ah, no!" I sighed, and added insinuatingly, "but I have never read the history of the ill-fated Mary of Scotland without costing myself a tear."

"Had I been the executioner," says the Captain, grimly, "there had been no bungling at the lopping of her lovely wicked head."

"My dear Captain, you are perfectly convinced of that?" And I searched the harsh man terribly with my eyes.

He lowered his own a point, and coughed to cover his confusion. I had now to tell the Captain of the Corporal's misfortune. While in the act of doing this, I kept a look-out for his anger, but except for the most delicate little smile that seemed to go crawling round his jaw, his face was as simple and inscrutable as ever.

"I think, madam," says he, "that I should praise the address you have displayed. For the second time you have outwitted his Majesty the King. But pray, madam, be careful of the third. The third time is generally crucial."

"Do I discover a warning or a threat in this, sir?" I pleasantly inquired.

"Only the expression of an honest admiration," says the Captain, whose kind smile on this occasion appeared to be dancing round his teeth.

The Corporal was released that evening. I regret that this honest man's opinion of my conduct in this case is not preserved among my archives. I feel sure that had I been able to supply it, it would have won the approbation of the gentle reader.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTAIN TRUMPS MY TRICK.

I AM now come to some grave adventures. Even at the remote hour at which I here retail them, I hardly know whether to shudder or to smile, so whimsical they were, yet so fraught with consequences of the gravest sort. Indeed, their memory seems a quaint mingling of laughter and dismay. There is, I think, scarcely an event in life that cannot be made food for ridicule by the lightly-minded. In that category I count one, my kind friends tell me, but of the strange duel that was fought at which I presided in my person, of the conflict of wills and passions that befel, of the hopes, the fears, the plottings, the contrivings, the general foxiness of everyone, but most of all of me; the stern contentions that appeared to some of us to turn the whole world topsy-turvy, I could not at the time decide whether to grin or groan at. And faith! even at this date, I am not come to a decision.

The very night of the Corporal's detention and release, was the date of the first of these important matters. The hour was midnight, or rather more, when I got into bed. The day with me had been so arduous that no sooner did my head meet the pillow than I was asleep. I was aware of nothing till

consciousness was restored to me all at once, and I found myself sitting up in the sheets and listening to strange sounds. It was very dark, and the wind outside still seemed to be crying with a night voice ; but some unprecedented thing had surely taken place, else I should not have thus awoke to find all my senses strained and tense with apprehension. 'Twas a cold enough sensation to discover oneself sitting thus, with the darkness and silence of death enveloping the chamber. I was in the act of resettling myself snugly for repose, when the cause of my awakening became apparent. Several muffled but heavy footfalls ' heard just the hither side the curtains of my bed, and while I was fearfully speculating upon the nature of these sounds, for it was an eerie hour, I caught a noise as of the soft-closing of my chamber door. At first the horrid, quiet gloom, and the mystery of it all made a coward of me, and I drew the blankets convulsively about my head, and sought to subdue the ticking of my heart. But hearing them repeated in the corridor outside, curiosity managed to suppress my fears, and I stole from my bed to satisfy it. Opening the door with the tenderest care, I peeped cautiously across the threshold. The landing window being uncurtained, the long corridor leading to the stairs was sensibly lighter than my room. The cause of the alarm was immediately made plain. A dim figure was creeping painfully towards the stairs, and dark as it was, my excited eyes were keen enough to identify its faint outlines and its singular condition. 'Twas a man's shape shuffling heavily along; one portion pre-

cariously supported by a stick, the other by a hand pressed against the wall. As soon as I discerned the details appertaining to him, I had read the riddle of his apparition. It was none other than my good friend Captain Grantley!

I slipped back into bed with all the sleep banished from my eyes. A remarkable trembling held me now in every joint. 'Twas a spasm of downright, arrant fear. Yea, my good friend, Captain Grantley, was verily the devil! Every day served to reveal in new and unexpected ways the depth and audacity of his wit. This further manifestation of it almost paralysed me. 'Twas no common cunning that had taught him to conceal for what must have been several days the right condition of his knee.

As I lay awake striving to find a means to check this latest move of my subtle enemy's, several bitter facts were writ upon my mind. First, that I was not his match in craft, no matter how considerable my own; farther, that if by any chance he had found his way this night to the room of Prue, our game was lost. There was only one ray of comfort that his nocturnal expedition brought. It was that whatever might be his suspicions in regard to the prisoner's presence in the house, he held no evidence wherewith to confirm them, else he had not gone night-walking to obtain it. But had this night-excursion given him the knowledge? 'Twas a baffling problem. However, I hoped and believed that he had been unable to visit the room of Prue, since for safety's sake I insisted that she

should promise to lock her door. Yet in dealing with a person of the Captain's calibre, who shall make enough of an allowance for the scope of his talents and activities? Faith, I had learned to dread this subtle foe more utterly than anything since the bogies of my childhood! I do not think I should have feared him so could I only have killed the reluctant admiration that, in despite of myself, his skill commanded.

You may be sure that at the dawn's appearance I rose earlier than my wont was; and while I made my toilette I sent a message to the masquerader to induce him to come abroad as early as he could, for I felt unable to enjoy any peace of mind until I had let him know his latest danger. And I was the more eager to confide in him, inasmuch as at a crisis he could display a fine intelligence.

I greeted him with this momentous question:

"Did you lock your chamber door last night, sir?"

"I did," he answered.

"Then," says I, "you may congratulate yourself on your escape."

Therewith I retailed the remarkable experiences I had so lately undergone. While I did this I noted that his face grew very stern and ugly.

"Bab," says he at the conclusion, "these play-house tricks of ours will do well to have an ending. This Captain man is too devilish ingenious to be tolerated any more. He's too early on the perch for us, Bab, and that's a fact. He must either have his wings clipped, else I must fly away."

"The time is not yet for you to fly, my lad," says I; "you know very well that I have decided to hold you here until I can have you carried privily to London, and then shipped straightway from Deptford to the Continent. But as to the clipping of the Captain's wings, how shall you set about it?"

"There is a way, you can depend upon it," he replied with a significance that startled me; "though to be sure 'tis not one that's very gentle."

"What do you mean, sir?" says I, while a light came in his eyes that made them shine like meteors.

"Well, I mean just this," says he, "For me to fly from this house to-day is certain death, as you remind me. But it is equally impossible for me to be here abiding now that the Captain's so alert. 'Twill not be advisable for this house to hold us both another day. Therefore one of us must go; and if the name of that one does not happen to be Dare, then I think it's Grantley."

"A very pregnant and luminous piece of reasoning," says I, "but provided it is Grantley, how are you going to set the man in motion?"

"You think the man will need a spur?" says he.

"I do indeed," says I, "and one both sharp and covert."

"I have here the very thing," says he. Upon the word he fumbled in his skirts, and presently produced a little leather case therefrom. Plucking off the top, he shewed me that a small venomous stiletto lay twinkling in it. As you may suppose I took several seconds to recover my breath, then cried:

"What, you bloody-handed rogue, have you murder in you mind?"

"Some may call it murder," he meekly said, "and some may call it sin, and as I'm not a learned man I shan't dispute 'em. But the pith of the affair is this. If Grantley can contrive to rattle the first blow in among my ribs, then I shall be a corpse. Yet, on the other hand, if I can get the first home I shan't need to strike again."

"Silence, wretch!" I commanded him sternly. "Do you dare to talk of murder to my face, then?"

"Some may call it murder," he repeated, "but it never was a name of mine. It's a time of open war, you see; the rebel and the redcoat; and I'm a rebel, as you are aware."

"Well, at the best," says I, "even if one can square one's conscience, 'tis not the right English fashion, sir; and therefore I'll none of it."

"No," says he reluctantly, "perhaps it's not. And certainly an open fight would consort kinder with my temper; but how is one to be arranged? Alas! it is impossible."

"Impossible or not," says I, "I am not the one to wink at murder."

"None the less I would remind you, madam," he insisted, "that one there'll be if once the man on whose behalf you are interfering can set his hands on me. Tyburn Tree is murder as surely as is an inch of steel."

"I am not likely to forget it," says I, "but I propose to select a choicer instrument than the stilette wherewith to save your life."

But I found it easier indeed to avert than to perform. My interdiction against murder I rigidly enforced; but how to procure the advantages of that extreme act without paying for them bloodily caused me to waste hours in fruitless thought. Affairs were at a head, and something demanded to be done. Captain Grantley was no more the tiger caged. The fierce, intrepid animal had managed to break his prison, and now was on the prowl. Small doubt that he was stealthy, savage, and vindictive. Unless I took an immediate means to ensure the safety of the helpless creature cowering beneath my promise of protection, he would be torn limb from limb, and that despite my vows. And in good sooth things had gone so far that I felt that if by a mischance the poor lad should perish after all, my heart must perish too.

I now come to perhaps the strangest evening of my life. It behoves me, therefore, to be respectful of all that did occur. As I have said, supper was the meal when the family and any guests receiving our hospitality were expected to assemble, that the evening might be spent in cheerful intercourse. Ever a social being, the Earl, my papa, when in the country was a great stickler for this rule. Therefore, when the bell summoned us to the board on this most eventful evening, any tremors that we had we were compelled to lay aside, while we descended to the supper-table. As our enemy had made no move during the progress of the day, we were led to foster the opinion that, whatever his suspicions, his errand had been barren, and that accordingly he lacked a positive knowledge of the rebel's sanctuary in our house.

I remember that both Miss Prue and I robed with particular care this evening. Miss Prue heightened her complexion to an almost hectic hue, for she reminded me that she was in a very "killing" humour. We dawdled into the dining-room with arms about the waists of one another, as is the fashion of dear friends. My aunt and my papa were there already; the usual salutations were interchanged, and no circumstance suggested that aught beyond the common would occur. But, indeed, an omen thrust itself upon me a moment later when I noted that an extra chair was ranged against the table, which was also laid for five instead of four.

"Why, aunt," cries I, "who is to be our visitor?"

"Patience, child," my aunt replied, with such an amiable air that forthwith I suspected her of treachery. And, straight, a pang went through me, for I was almost sure that we had been lured into a trap from which it was now too late to escape. And even as this thought afflicted me, suspicion became dire fact. The door appeared to open and a commotion arose the other side of the screen. A sound of shuffling, accompanied by a painfully slow gait, published to me the worst ere even the ubiquitous Captain hove in view. He came to the table leaning on the shoulder of a servant, and was propped up also by a stick.

You can suppose that every detail of the Captain's mien and conduct is writ down in my mind. First he advanced in the most unincriminating

manner, bowed profoundly over my aunt's extended hand, accepted the kind words and congratulations of my lord with an air of admirable courtesy and pleasure, put his palm across his heart and smiled, and bowed to me as gracefully and deeply as his predicament allowed, and generally held himself with a sweeping ease that was sublime. Nor was I much behind him there. I turned to the poor masquerader who was sustaining the ordeal nobly, and said in a full, clear tone:

"Prue, dear, permit me to present to you Captain Grantley, of the Thirty-third, one of my oldest and most cherished friends."

Bows were exchanged by both parties with a gravity that would have been enjoyable had one's fears been quieter. Without more ado we assumed our chairs, and the meal began. My appetite was gratified with a mere pretence of eating, and even this barmecidal course was begrudged it by my heart. Here I was sensibly the poorest actor of the three, for the Captain laughed, joked, drank, and supped with a military heartiness, while Miss Prue requested him to pass the salt with the demurest smile you ever saw. It was quite on the cards, of course, that the Captain was still in ignorance of the Honourable Prudence Canticle's true identity, as her disguise really was without a shade of doubt ingenious. Yet, on the other hand, to accept this as a fact would be the height of assumption. The Captain was a terrible variety of man to whose depth it was impossible to put a limit. He was a master of the art of concealing what he knew. He had the

trick of wooing one into the comfortable notion that he was pretty well an ignoramus, when he had practically taken all knowledge for his province. Thus, his present air of candour notwithstanding, I was woefully afraid.

The conversation was unceasing. The Captain kept up a rattle of the delightfulest inconsequence, made jests upon his leg that actually enticed the dowager into a smile, and seemed most magnanimously inclined to forget the injuries to his person and his reputation, let bygones be bygones, and pardon even me, the arrantest rebel that had yet to grin through hemp.

Later, on retiring to the withdrawing room, we had cards as usual. Going from one apartment to the other, I was able to secure a short aside with Prue.

"Suppose," says I, "you now contract a headache, and retire for the evening? The less you are exposed the better."

"Not I," says she; "I'll see it through. If he hath already smelled me out, nought can avail me. If he hath not, but is lingering in doubt, he will take the fact of my seizing the first chance of escaping from his scrutiny as an important evidence, and will feed his suspicions on it."

I had to admit that this in the main was shrewd. Prue came therefore and bore a hand at cards. The play was continued pretty late. All things were amicable as could be, and gradually, as the hours passed, our dark suspicions of the early evening were considerably laid. The dowager retired at the

sound of twelve, as was her custom. The best part of an hour later, growing drowsy and uncertain in his play, the Earl rose, gave us good-night, and also went to bed.

On the withdrawal of my lord my spirits rose remarkably, for I judged that all our doubts were about to be resolved. If the Captain was still our dupe he would remain, of course, quiescent; or if he had spied our deception out it was natural to expect him by word or deed to betray something of his knowledge. But he continued playing with such an imperturbable and easy mien, his voice remained so candid and so clear, his eye so open and indulgent, and his manner so frank and unrestrained, that soon reassuring glances were exchanged between the masquerader and myself.

For what followed I am, perhaps, to be in a measure blamed. Lulled into security by the conduct of our enemy, to some extent I gave the rein to my own desires. From the first I had been winning steadily, and my appetite for play, always vigorous, seemed to increase as my guineas grew. True, half these gains had originally been money of my own, Prue having been furnished with means for this diversion from my purse, but the Captain was undoubtedly a loser.

"There!" he cries at last, "that completes the second hundred. And under your leave, madam, 'tis high time, I think, the loser called, 'hold, enough!'"

"Then you do not care to work your evil vein out, sir?" says I.

"I should be only too glad to try, dear lady," he replied, "if I had not other work to do. Besides, you will observe that, strive as I may, I cannot scrape together another guinea or another bank-bill."

As a proof he fumbled with his pockets mightily. He exposed the linings of those in his coat, and playfully remarked:

"You see, quite empty!"

But how little did we divine his strategy! The next moment showed that this search for money was but a pretext; and a spasm of mingled rage and horror seared me when his true intention was unmasked.

Suddenly, as he sat opposing Prue and me the other side the little card-table, his right hand was shot across in the direction of my companion, and a pistol was exposed and rigidly presented within six inches of her face.

"Stir a muscle, Anthony Dare," says the Captain, "and you're dead."

I could almost feel the poor lad flinch under his heavy rouge. He said not a word though, but only trembled and stared dumbly at the iron.

For myself I gave one look at these enemies, and then rose in a tempest of rage and pity.

"Man," I says, "are you mad? Anthony Dare? What do you mean?"

"A neat deception, an elegant deception," says the Captain, "and I give you my compliments upon it, madam; but now I think it's at an end. I'll confess 'tis pretty enough for boozy troopers; therefore, madam, again my compliments upon it."

My reply would have been a fury had he not silenced me with his glance.

"Hush, madam," says he, "unless you desire to have the house aroused. To spare you an exposure I have submitted to some inconvenience and run a certain risk by moving in the matter at this unseasonable hour, when broad daylight would be greater to my profit. For, believe me, I am beyond all things anxious to serve your interests so far as my duty will permit."

"Or your inclination," says I, harshly.

"Mr. Dare," says the Captain to his prisoner, "I would have you place both your open hands upon the table-cloth, for, Mr. Dare, in my opinion you are as skilful as they're grown, allowing for your years and opportunities. Let me admit at once, sir, that I entertain a considerable opinion of you. But if, Mr. Dare, I might venture to advise you, I should make as little noise to-night as possible or the reputation of her ladyship will be undoubtedly in peril."

'Twas rather like being choked with a surfeit of strawberries and cream, or maddened with a brook of silver melody to hear the Captain use this complimentary tenderness with the subtle notes of triumph ringing underneath it. And his face! His eyes appeared to overflow with admiration and solicitude. But there was a quiet curl about his mouth that made him wholly hateful. The prisoner was the next to speak.

"Captain," he said, "I'm squarely ta'en. And if you will promise to spare her ladyship I'll yield

unreservedly. If you will not, you will have to put a bullet through me, for 'tis more to my taste than Tyburn in the cart."

Here, despite himself, the poor wretch shivered.

"Willingly," says the Captain, "and that's a bargain. Give me your word upon it, sir, and then I can put this bit of iron up."

Thereon the prisoner bowed in assent to his captor, who quietly replaced the pistol in his coat.

"Mr. Dare," says the Captain with great suavity, "might I suggest that you change your clothes before my men can note them."

"On the contrary, Mr. Dare," says I, "I would suggest, for my part, that you advertise yourself before them in this attire. For I do not doubt that they will rejoice to learn what handsome fools they are."

"My Lady Barbara is surely hard upon them," says the Captain. "Something should be allowed for her powers of deceit."

"Would you insult me, sir?" I cries, dying to pick a quarrel with the man. There are periods when one would forfeit willingly one's figure in the world to have a virago's privileges for a short five minutes. However, I saw full bitterly that railing could not avail.

Perforce I kept my gaze from the white-faced prisoner. I could not endure to see the lad. Not that he took the matter ill. He was outwardly as calm as was his foe. But there was something in his mien that made a dreadful coward of me at a time when I could have wished to be most brave.

A horrid silence presently ensued. The Captain had said his say already. And I had much to speak, but for my life I could not speak it then. As for the prisoner, when I stole a look at him, he was staring with grim eyes at Sir Peter Lely's picture of my mother, hung upon the wall. But he stood as silent as the tomb. Then it was that our enemy, the Captain, acted in the strangest way—but one, I think, that honoured both his heart and his intelligence.

"I will withdraw," says he, looking tenderly at me. "For I fear it will be your last hour together." Then looking at his prisoner, "when you are ready, Mr. Dare, if you will step into the library you will find me at your service."

Saying this he rose and hobbled out upon his crutch.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH I AM WOODED AND WON.

I WAS quite joyfully startled at the Captain's course.

"Now what's the fellow mean by this?" I whispered to the lad. "Is it to give you one more chance while his back is turned, out of pure compassion, or is he fool enough to trust you?"

"He is fool enough to trust me, madam," says the lad, haughtily I thought.

"Very charming of him," I admitted. "There must be a deal of poetry in his soul. But come, sir! there is not one second to be lost. Steal upstairs and get your skirts off, while I find some guineas for you, and letters to recommend you to the consideration of some southern friends."

This drew fierce looks from him, but he exchanged them when he spoke for a haggard smile.

"Ah, madam," he said, "you do not understand."

"I understand only too well," I sighed. "Tyburn Tree, my lad, and an end to everything. But for the love of heaven, cease this babbling! Off with you at once, or your chance is gone for ever."

But the Captain is fool enough to trust me, madam," he repeated.

"Then you refuse to fly?" I demanded, trembling in my eagerness.

"I do," says he.

"Then I hope you'll hang," I cried, "yes, simpleton that you are, I hope you'll hang."

However, at the mention of his certain fate, I was no longer mistress of myself, for I sat down suddenly in a very unreasonable fashion, covered my eyes with my hands, and allowed my tears to break forth in the most uncontrollable flood I've ever shed. When I desisted somewhat from this, and next looked up, the prisoner was at my side, and bending over me with a tenderness that added to my woe. Hardly a minute had fled since last I had seen his face, yet in that little time it appeared to have aged by twenty years. Great as my own pains were, I knew them to be equalled by his own, for he was plainly suffering a very bitter agony.

"Madam," he said, with his native bluntness refined into a strange sweetness by his grief, "would to God I had never known you! You make the thought of death terrible hard to bear."

"Oh!" I sobbed, with a ridiculous riot in my breast, "I thought I was never in your style; I thought you never cared; I thought——"

"You are a wonderful brave woman," he says, in a whisper, "a wonderful brave woman."

One of his tears fell down upon my shoulder. Sore was I tempted to indulge myself with weeping too, but knowing well that the prisoner had not a hope of life other than one that I might find him, I fought against my weakness till in a measure it was overcome. But the face of the prisoner was before me always, and again did my eyes grow dark and heavy with their tears.

"Child, do not be afraid," I said, trying for conscience sake to affix on him the guilt that was my own. "Be brave; the matter is not so cruel as it looks."

He did not answer, but his smile was grim. And it seemed wonderful to me that the faculties of his mind should remain so keen when Death's shadow was darkening his heart.

"Madam," he said gently, after a miserable silence, "give me your hand just once in parting, and I shall consider that the climax to a life that never was unhappy. For your courage, madam, is the sweetest memory I have; and I mean to bear it ever."

"No, no," I said, while my tears broke forth again, "do not afflict me with farewells. They are more than I can suffer. Oh, my lad, I cannot let you go like this! My life begins and ends with you."

"But for you, my fair, sweet lady," he replied, "I could receive death easily. But I can rejoice that I've known you, and that you have been my friend. And now it were better that I took my leave, for the longer that we are together the sharper will the separation be." I heard a half-checked groan escape him. Afterwards he said: "Oh, what a loveliness grief hath lent you! Never did you look so beautiful before to-day."

"Yes," I sobbed, "you always said you liked 'em clinging."

"Let us say good-bye," he whispered. "At least, let us have done with this."

"Child, be brave," I recommended him, with a

depth in irony that it was well he could not fathom.

"I blame you for my cowardice," he said.

There was a quiver in his face that even he could not conceal. I felt almost happy when I saw it, for it told me that at last even the untameable was tamed.

"You do not want to die?" I asked him, softly.

"No," he stammered, "I do not want to die."

"And why do you not want to die?" I continued, without pity. "There was a time, you know, when you were not so troubled with this scruple."

"'Tis an unnecessary question," he said, while a glance came from him that sank into my heart.

"Is it that you have come to love me?" says I, in my monumental innocence.

"I—a beggar?"

"Nay, sir," says I, "not a beggar. You lack his first essential, his humility. Suppose we say a sturdy rogue?"

"A sturdy rogue, then."

"Well, an he loves me, I can pardon the presumption of a sturdy rogue."

"You had better do so, then," says he.

"That is, you love me, sir," I demanded sternly.

"By God I do!" he cries.

"Which is very well," says I, "as, all things considered, sir—well, all things considered, sir—that is, at least, I think it's very well. And as you love me, sir, I would have you steal out through the window of this room, creep across the park into the wood, and I will meet you there in half an hour with money, a disguise, and such like necessities."

"And my promise to the Captain, madam?"

"The Captain is your enemy," says I. "He seeks to kill you."

He shook his head in defiance of my open anger.

Now here was a point that I never could distinguish. Why, in the first place, the Captain should have dared to trust a desperate rebel upon his simple word, was beyond my understanding; again, why, when his enemy had been fool enough to do so, that rebel did not profit by this credulity was even greater mystery. Of course I have heard soldiers talk about their "honour," and I had lately learnt to know that his "honour" was the one flaw in the complete armour of that worldling, my papa; but for my life I cannot see why a man should extend more consideration to it than he would, as in this present case of young Anthony, to death itself. And certainly I think that there is never a woman of us all that, being put in his tight place, but would have stretched her word a point. Bab Gossiter herself would have done so, I can promise you.

Still the prisoner was obdurate. And if he, of all persons, refused to connive at his own escape, verily his case was dark. But there was one other. Who knew but that after all he might relent a little under the fire of my eyes? The Captain had flinched before their powers once; perchance he might again.

"My lad," I said, turning to the prisoner, "wait here till I return. I wish to speak a few words with the Captain."

"On my behalf?" says he.

"Oh, no," says I, promptly; for did I not know his disposition was peculiar? Even as I went, however, I could see that he did not set much value on my word, and it was a nice question whether he had accepted it.

I found the Captain sitting before the library fire. The blaze playing on his face showed it sombre and deeply overcast with thought. When I entered alone a visible embarrassment took hold of him, and I believe it was because he had noted the red and inflamed appearance of my eyes.

"I am come to plead, sir," says I, plunging at once into my bitter task.

"My dear lady, I had feared it," he said.

"He is very young," I said, "very misguided probably, but a youthful error is not to be punished with the scaffold."

"It is the law," says he, sadly.

"Humanity is more potent than the law, sir." My tears broke forth again.

"And," said the Captain, with great gentleness, "Lady Barbarity at every season and in every circumstance is always humane."

His voice made me shiver. There was a metallic harshness creeping out from underneath the velvet tones. His face, too, had grown dark with sneers and sardonic meaning. I struggled to be resolute, but the Fates were against me. The shadow of death was lying on my heart, and steel it as I might it could not forbear trembling at the Captain's words, that were as cold as doom, and twice as cruel

"My Lady Barbarity is ever humane," the Captain said. "There would be no pretext for her title else."

"I will confess, sir," says I, "that I never had any particular compassion for fools. In my opinion, sir, it is no worse to trample on a fool than it is to beat a dog."

"Well, madam," says the Captain, very like a judge, "that, I think, is a matter for your conscience. But is it not rather a flaw in policy, don't you think, to come to a fool on whom you have trampled with a plea for mercy?"

"Captain Grantley," says I, warningly.

"You must forgive my bluntness, madam," he continued, "but I, a fool, have been compelled to suffer greatly at your hands. You may have forgotten last year in London, and this very room but a week ago, but I can assure you, madam, that I have not. I have passed through a purgatory of hope and jealousy, and for what reason, madam? Simply that, to serve your private ends, you have deigned to shoot a few smiles out of your eyes. And under your pardon, madam, I will say those eyes of yours are poisoned daggers that corrupt everything they strike. At least, I know they have corrupted my very soul."

He ended this strange speech with a groan. There was a still passion in him that was alarming. If ever a man meant mischief, surely this was he.

"But, sir," I said, "you must understand that I am not pleading for myself."

"No, only for the man you love," says he.

I saw he was white to the lips.

"Sir," says I, "if this were not so nonsensical, I should deem it an impertinence."

"It is only to saints that plain truths are in-offensive," the Captain answered.

Again and yet again I returned to the attack, only to discover that I had to deal with a cold man kindled. Here was a person not to be fired easily; a chance spark would not light him; but once ablaze and he would not cease burning until the whole of him was ashes. I had only to look at his face observantly to find proofs of the havoc I had caused. His eyes were bright and hollow; his cheeks had fallen in. Hitherto I had held these the signs of the mind's anxiety at his long captivity and his prisoner's escape. But had I plumbed deeper to the sources of his malady I should have found that they sprang from the bitter sufferings of his heart. And whatever the shining qualities of this gentleman, I knew from the beginning that magnanimity was not among them. He had endured the pain that I had wantonly inflicted on him, bravely and proudly, but he had also abided his time. Alas, that his time was now!

Looking at his cold eyes, and the scorn of his lips, I knew that he meant to punish me. There was not one relenting glance to give me hope. I do not think I am a greater coward than my sisters, but somehow all at once I felt my courage go. This patient foe seemed too powerful and wary; I was but as a reed in his hands; he could break me now and cast me to the ground. I shall not describe my long, fervent pleadings with him. I was made

to command and not to pray; therefore, I believe a creature of a humbler mind would have borne this matter more effectively. For my every plea fell on a heart of stone. At last I cried out from the depths of desperation: "Is there no price in the world that would tempt you to spare him?"

His answer was startling.

"Yes, madam, one," he said.

"Name it, sir!" I cried springing to my feet in my excitement. "Name it, sir, and please God it shall be paid!"

"Become my wife madam. On that condition only do I release your lover."

You have seen the actors in the playhouse strike their attitudes, and deliver their high speeches with the most poignant effect. You know that you are pierced, not by a natural emotion, but by art and a studied utterance. I had this feeling in the most intensified degree when my subtle enemy announced with wonderful seeming candour, the price I had to pay. Of a sudden, however, his gravity was exchanged for a laughter equally insincere. At first I took it for the mere brutality of mockery in the playhouse manner, but as again and again it returned upon him, and rose to a horrible hysteria, it was presently borne upon me that I was not so much the object of his hollow mirth, as the agonised James Grantley.

Despite the magnitude of his demand I was not slow to answer. Though I had an instinct that this momentous circumstance demanded at least a day and a night for ponderation, I felt quite incapable of coolly considering it for twenty seconds. Con-

scious of nothing beyond the blood droning in my brain, I replied to my enemy:

"Captain, I accept the conditions you have named."

Perhaps the man was not prepared for this, for his face grew painful in its pallor, while the fire burned deeper in his eyes.

"Madam," says he, in a voice hardly to be endured, "I suppose you are aware that this will ruin me?"

"And you, sir," I said, politely, "that I shall be damned eternally?"

"Take a more cheerful view of it, dear lady," he mockingly invited me.

"Captain," says I, "do you know that you most remind me of an angry wasp? You are prepared to destroy yourself to gratify the lust of your revenge."

Thus with these sweet speeches was our wooing done!

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS.

CONCLUDING our compact in the quickest fashion, I went back to the prisoner with the news. I chose to tell him simply that he was a free man, and at liberty to go. No more; a very exact discretion being needed to keep the arbitrary rogue apart from his heroic foibles. I was also careful to announce his freedom in a tone of bald matter-of-fact, as though the circumstance was the most natural in the world. Yet my art was by no means equal to the work before it, as at the first word the provoking fellow turned a sceptic's eye upon me, and employed his lips on a long and sustained whistle of amused amazement.

"Zooks, madam!" says he, laughing, "you ought to succeed, you know. You possess a very considerable invention. But my soul, what a front you've got to bring me tales of this kind!"

"Cease this," says I, with an imperious gesture, "but go to your chamber at once and change your attire, whilst I indite letters commending you to the attention of some of my friends. Off now, ere the Captain repents his clemency."

However, his incredulity was not to be overcome in this way, and point blank he declined to budge. He

was good enough to frankly repeat that he did not believe me. And to my credit be it written, I retained my temper tolerably well. My natural disposition had I think a severer schooling in my early intercourse with this intractable youth than in all the rest of its career. Not without benefit, perhaps, but I marvelled at the time, and do so still, that this irksome discipline should have been so equally supported.

To my stern commands and repeated protests he had only one answer to return, and that not a whit politer than the one already mentioned.

"However, I'll see the Captain," says he, at last.

"Then do so, and be hanged to you!" cries I, my temper failing.

But immediately the hasty speech was uttered, I strove to recall it. Beyond all he must not hear of my compact with our subtle enemy, the Captain, for I was certain that should he do so he would not permit it to take effect. Yet I was unable to stay him in his impetuous course, and therefore followed on his heels to the library with the best grace I could summon. At critical moments I could at least forewarn the Captain with my frowns.

When I appeared the prisoner was already there, and had opened a raking fire.

"Captain," he said, with what I took to be a mocking gleam at me, "her ladyship asserts that you have promised her my freedom. Be good enough to tell me, is that so?"

"Her ladyship is perfectly correct," he answered, and the mocking gleam in his eye I also took to be directed at me.

The prisoner paused at this and turned half round that he might regard our guilty faces together. I can never say whether it was that my colour changed ever so slightly, whether the faintest shade of compunction crossed the Captain's face, or whether the rebel was supernaturally endowed with wit, but suddenly his eyes were kindled with sparkles, and he turned almost savagely on me:

"Madam," he demanded, "what is the price that you are paying for this privilege?"

The sharp question pinned me helpless. And I was forced to recognise that evasion, if still expedient, was no longer possible. There was that power in him that tore the truth out of me, even as at an earlier time it had torn it out of Mrs. Emblem.

"I am to marry my dear friend Captain Grantley," I told him coolly.

He turned to that gentleman for a confirmation. It was promptly conveyed to him by means of a nod and a laugh.

"And you, sir, a subject of your King and a servant of his cause?" says the prisoner tauntingly.

The Captain got up, smiling through his teeth.

"If, sir," says he, "you propose to preach a sermon on morality, I shall be glad to reach the Bible down."

"Oh, pray don't trouble," said the rebel suavely. "As your own conduct, sir, happens to be my text, the Bible, of course, can contribute little to the occasion. Besides, sir, my opinion of you as a man can be delivered in about half a dozen words. You are, sir, in my opinion, a pretty, full-blooded black-

guard, and I think, sir, that for persons of your kidney hanging is a luxury."

The Captain bent his head a little under these carefully-planted blows. But he remained wonderfully self-possessed and passionless.

"Thank you, puppy" he replied, making a scarcely noticeable step the nearer to his foe, "but I think that your opinion, however valuable, is not at all required. Therefore, puppy, I shall have to teach you that there are occasions when it were wiser to restrain it."

And having uttered this in an absurdly calm and listless fashion the Captain shot his fist out quicker than the eye could follow it, and ere one might guess what had occurred, a horrid, heavy fall made the room quake and set the furniture a rattling. Young Anthony was prone upon the carpet with a faint streak of blood beginning to issue from his neck.

In an instant was I bending over him, and crying in my anguish:

"Oh, my dear lad, you are not hurt!"

At first he did not speak, being partly dazed with the concussion of his fall, but before I could repeat the question, behold! he was on his feet and springing at the Captain with the ardour of a lion. His enemy was wary though, and prepared in every particular for this onslaught. Armed with his crutch he received the charge full upon that weapon, with farther disastrous consequences to the youth, who straightway met the carpet for the second time. 'Twas then that I did intervene. I ran between these combatants, and dared them on pain of unutterable penalties to exchange another blow.

"Confound you, Bab!" exclaimed the bleeding and breathless rebel. "Confound you for a Spoil-sport! Why don't you let me pound your gentle husband to a jelly!"

"What, pound my gentle husband?" says I, "a pretty wife I'd be, I'm thinking."

For an instant this way of looking at the matter administered a check to his impetuosity, and by its aid I took occasion to beseech:

"My lad, if you care for your life at all, go while the door is open to you. Another blow will close it; aye, perhaps another word. Go, I implore you."

"No," says he, doggedly, "for the finest woman in all England I will not go. Things have gone too far. Would you have me leave you at the mercy of this nice gentleman? Let me kill him first, and then we will talk about it."

He was quite cool now, and in full possession of the arrogant decision that seemed such an embellishment to his character. Therefore he stepped to the windows at the far end of the apartment, pulled aside the curtains, and looked into the night. Immediately the white moonlight fell upon the deeper pallor of his face.

"See," says he, turning to his enemy, "there's light enough outside to settle our little controversy. Swords or pistols, sir?"

"Boots," says the Captain amiably; "I don't fight with boys; I usually kick them."

"Well, sir," says the lad, "my situation is peculiar. I am your prisoner, and at liberty on parole, but I ask you as a gentleman whether it is likely that I shall

swallow the insults of a private person! What is your opinion, madam?"

This was intended for diplomacy. It was plain that he wished me to induce the Captain to fight, but the risks of that course appeared too terrible by far for me to seize the opportunity.

"Save your neck first," was my answer, "then settle your private quarrels."

"And you, madam, are prepared to purchase my liberty with your own?" says he.

"I believe so," says I, with an air of high indifference. "You foolish boy, do you think it matters one farthing to a woman whom she marries, so long as she is but able to marry someone? Now be a good lad, doff those petticoats, wipe the blood from your neck where the Captain's ring hath scratched you, and start for the south without another word."

"No," says he, "for that is the very last course I propose to take. You shall never sacrifice yourself for me."

"Sacrifice!" cries I; "La! the complimentary creature. 'Twill be a pleasure, I can promise you. Why, Captain dear, we are to have a right merry time together, are we not?"

"Yes, a right merry time," says the Captain grimly.

"Oh, indeed," says Mr. Anthony. "Ah, well, I am glad to hear you say so. For I'll confess that I've had my doubts about it. Only I'm thinking that when his Majesty grows cognisant of this he may seek to mar the happiness of one of you at least."

"Depend upon it, sir," I retorted stoutly, "that he will not hear of it."

I continued to be so insistent on his immediate flight, and at the same time my determined attitude was so well served by the grim passiveness of the Captain, that in the end compliance seemed to be the young rebel's only and inevitable course. And, to my great relief, this was the one he ultimately took.

"Well," he exclaimed at last, "its plain that argument cannot avail."

"Not a little bit, sir," I cheerily agreed.

"Then," says he, "I'll go and change these clothes, while you write those letters to your friends."

"You will find your masculine attire," I said, with a sly twinkle for the Captain, "up the chimney in your chamber, tied up in a cloth. When the search was done we took them there from the wardrobe of my lord."

"I am hoping that the soot has not penetrated 'em," says he, making the most comic mouth.

"Amen to that!" says I; "and now be off, sir."

With that dismissal he left the library for his sleeping chamber, whilst I, craving the due permission of the Captain, sat down at the writing table before pen and paper, and set about my part of the transaction.

The best portion of an hour passed in the scratching of the quill with intervals of perilous desultory talk. I was in the most hateful frame of mind. Its alternate flutterings of hope and fear were very irksome. The lad seemed to be playing fair, and yet I knew that nothing was more unreasonable to expect, of a character like his, than that he should be content to leave me in the lurch, when that very night he had had so clear an indication of my feelings. And yet,

I reflected, the shadow of the scaffold is powerful indeed. Poor wretch, torn betwixt the vigorous animal's love of life, and instincts of a higher kind ! I weighed the matter with such a singular mingling of emotions, that I felt I should detest young Anthony if he left me to my fate, and yet should curse him for his folly if he refused his proffered freedom. During that hour of suspense the devil enjoyed himself, I think. Ten times I dismissed the matter by an energetic usage of the quill, yet ten times did it return upon me, with now and then a quiet jibe of my smiling enemy's thrown in to bear it company.

After dashing off several letters in this savage manner, I looked up to consult the timepiece. It was five minutes short of three o'clock of the morning, and I began to grow impatient for the fugitive's departure. The dawn would be here all too soon, and with it many perils. Each instant of delay was begrudged him by my mind's inquietude. Soon, however, I heard footsteps in the hall, but the first feelings of relief that these occasioned were changed immediately into those of profound dismay. For there was a sound of voices too. A second later the door was opened, and thereupon the sight that met my eyes nearly made me swoon. Two persons entered. The first was the prisoner, in his masculine attire ; the second, sparsely clad in a shirt, breeches, and stockings, hurriedly put on, was of all persons Corporal Flickers. I can never forget the rage and horror I endured, while the Corporal, who appeared by no means wholly awake, crammed his knuckles into his eyes to rub out the remains of his sleep, and protect

them against the lamp glare. At first the two soldiers were too amazed to say a word; I was too afflicted; and the prisoner alone seemed able to break the oppressive silence.

"Bab," says he, "you must forgive me for this, but you would persevere in your headlong folly, and I had to thwart you somehow. I could never have allowed you to pay the grievous price you had intended."

"What do you mean?" I cried. "Do not tell me that you have delivered yourself voluntarily into the hands of your enemies!"

He hung his head in silence before the indignation of my glance.

"Ingrate," I cried, "thus to thwart and to betray me."

"The price was too great," he said, doggedly, but the fear in his eyes was unmistakable. Meantime, Corporal Flickers had found his tongue, and was now engaged in giving the peculiar history of the capture to his commander.

"It's God's truth, sir, that that's the rebel," he began, in a tone that implied that he was trying hard to set all his own doubts at rest upon that point. Rubbing his eyes with renewed vigour, he repeated: "Yes, sir, that's 'im, I'll take my solemn oath. But it's passing funny how I took 'im. I was asleep in my room and a-dreamin' of my Mary, when I feels a hand quite sudding like upon my arm. At that I cocks up my eyes and sees a light afore me, and a man's figger a-bending across my bed. Like blue blazes, sir, I leaps to my feet, for I sees it is the rebel, and

I takes 'im by 'is throat. But he was the most accommodatin' rebel that you ever saw, for he stood quiet as a mouse, and says that I had done exactly what he had wakened me to do, for he was tired o' bein' hunted for his life, and would I bring him straight to you, sir. I told 'im I would an' all, and I done it lively, as you can see sir, for I only stayed to put my breeches and my shirt on. But atween you an' me, sir, though were all assembled here, sir,' and a-talking as natural as ninepence as it were, it won't surprise me much, sir, if I wakes up in the matter of half an hour and finds that I'm asleep, for everything seems that outrageous like that the more I thinks on it the less I can understand it. For what I asks is this: Is that the rebel that I see afore me or is it 'is counterfeit presentiment? And anyhow, sir, since that business o' the woods I can't be sure of 'im at all, sir, for in my opinion he's a bit of a soopernatural as it were."

"You are quite right, Corporal," I interposed. "He's a supernatural fool."

All this time the chiefest actor in this play, the Captain, had not said a word beyond a little hollow praise of the Corporal's sagacity and promptitude. Seen under the lamp his face presented the most ghastly and piteous appearance. False to his cause, false to himself, the dupe of his own passion, the slave of his own weakness, I began to conceive a great compassion for him, and a horror of my own callousness. As for the rebel, now that his headstrong folly had robbed him of his last chance of escape, all hope became abandoned. It was as much

as ever I could do to prevent my anger and sorrow mastering my spirit and giving way to a flood of passionate tears. All our strivings to end miserably thus! It was only the severest discipline that could allow me to endure it defiantly. And yet though his own wilful act was to drag him to an ignominious death, I could but reverence his character the more deeply for its natural courage. The wretched fellow's audacious strength had forged yet another bond about my heart.

Presently the Captain dismissed the Corporal, and thereby held himself responsible for his prisoner's safe keeping.

"I can also bid you good-night, madam, or, rather, good-morning," the Captain says. "The day has been most arduous for you, and I am sure you need some recuperation."

"You are very kind," says I.

Knowing that all was hopeless now, and that neither prayers nor tears could prevail against the prisoner's scruples, I decided to retire.

"You will not be gone for some hours yet," I said as I opened the door.

"One of us may," the Captain said.

Had I been in a brighter frame of mind I should have perhaps heeded this mysterious speech more closely, and found in it a prophecy of that which followed. But I went dismally to bed without thinking of its import. Despite the extremity of the hour, I found Emblem the picture of woe, sitting beside the fire in my chamber. Her customary smiling prettiness was faded with weeping; she hung her head, and rose

on my entrance with a peculiar frightened air. Clasping her hands, she whispered :

"They've ta'en him, my lady."

"And a very right thing too," says I.

"But will they not carry him to London to be hanged?" she asked, seeking for hope where hope was not.

"I am trusting so," says I, so cheerfully that my tears began to flow.

I soon came to the conclusion that my mood forbade repose, and therefore, instead of undressing and attempting to obtain a much-to-be-desired sleep, I dismissed poor Emblem, cast a cloak round my shoulders, took a chair by the hearth, and settled there for the remainder of the night, to doze, to think, and to repine.

However, this plan did not answer. It only induced a sickening course of meditation that was less endurable than the foulest nightmare. No matter what my posture, my agonies of mind grew unsupportable, and at last I cast the cloak off wearily, got up, and began to pace the chamber. It was while I was thus wrestling with my pains that I heard the far silence of the house disturbed by the closing of doors below. By the weight of the sounds and the jangling of the chains I presumed them to be those of the great hall, and as my window commanded the whole frontage of lawn and gravel sweep, I promptly pulled aside the curtains. Lanterns were twinkling immediately below, and by their aid and that of the clear-shining moon I was able to read the identity of two persons issuing from the house. They were the Captain and

his prisoner, walking side by side across the lawn in a south-westerly direction. They were heading for the open meadows, and appeared perfectly amicable and to be talking in low tones; but the briskness of their pace and their air of strung activity proclaimed that they had some definite end in view. For the moment I had not the remotest notion what this end could be, but while I stood at gaze and musing to discover it, a horrible idea crept into my brain. Surely nothing could be more unnatural than two sworn enemies working harmoniously together towards a common end, if that end was peace? But was it peace? In a convulsion of alarm I recalled the incidents of that hateful night, and amongst them was the calculated blow which surely the prisoner was the last man in the world to take with meekness. I then remembered the Captain's prophetic "One of us may," and at once attached to it a most sinister significance. Having reached this dark conclusion, my first desire was to defeat their wicked purposes. I cloaked myself at once for another night excursion, and having done so stole down the stairs as formerly, opened the great hall door with wondrous care, then peered ahead to discern the course of the receding lanterns.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH THE CAPTAIN'S COMEDY IS PLAYED.

I COULD see them clearly. They were now some distance to the left, apparently in the middle of the first home meadow. Thither I bent my course across wet turf in the piercing night, but with heed for nought save those baleful lanterns. For now I was never more convinced of anything than that these foes had come abroad to settle once for all their long account. By the rapidity with which I drew nearer to the lights, I concluded that their bearers had halted, probably to choose their battle-ground. Instinctively feeling this to be the case, I broke into a run. Clearing the lawn, leaping pell-mell across the grotto at its margin, and skirting the artificial lake, I emerged into the open field. It was so well lit by the bright moon, riding through white cloud, that I could see enough to confirm my coldest fears.

The lanterns were now reposing on the grass, while each man stood beside his own, perhaps at a distance of a dozen paces. They seemed to be fearlessly erect, and absolutely resolute, and this in itself was enough to prove that only death was likely to end their duel. Ere I had time to cry out, or even to overcome the first paralysis of the fear that held me, one of them, who by his breadth of figure I knew to be the Captain,

raised his right hand slowly. At that, although the actual time of the whole affair could not have exceeded half a minute, such tricks can terror play upon us, that the entire strength appeared to ooze slowly from my body, as though a surgeon had opened one of my vital arteries and was bleeding me to death by slow degrees. And the instant the Captain's hand went up, I stopped through arrant horror and that dreadful sense of sheer incompetence that afflicts one in a nightmare. I made one attempt to scream out to them, but my throat seemed useless, and my voice resembled the feeble croakings of a frog. Before I could make another, there came a sound like a mastiff's bay, and in the most cold, convulsive terror I put my hands before my eyes. They must have been still there, I think, and my ears have turned to stone, for to this day I swear that I never saw the second and the fatal shot, and, still stranger, actually did not hear it. But when my vision cleared I thought I saw one man prone beside his lantern, and the other bending over him.

The die cast, and the deed accomplished, my limbs resumed their proper office and I was able to proceed. Fate had intervened already, the worst had happened, the tragedy was consummated. The actual fact is ever easier to support than the suspense of it. While I ran to the scene of the murder, with my heart grown too big for my body, and apparently bursting through my side, so complete was the illusion played by terror upon my several senses, that I was absolutely sure that it was the prisoner who was hit, that I had lost a lover, and that the world had lost a hero.

When I arrived breathless upon the battle-ground, the survivor was kneeling still beside his fallen foe, and appeared to be feeling at his breast. But death ever wears an aspect that is wholly unmistakable, and the lad fully extended on his face, hands straight by his side, and his form prone beneath the ghastly moon, told me all too surely that the life had gone out of him for ever. Without a word I also fell upon my knees beside the corpse, and took one of the dead man's hands within my own. The murderer, still kneeling the other side the body, appeared to raise his face and look at me, and then he cried in a voice of hoarse astonishment :

"You?"

I did not answer, but still nursed the dead man's hand, almost without knowing that I did so, such strange things does passion do.

"Lady Barbara," he said in a voice quite unendurable to my ears.

"Do not speak," I whispered, "I cannot bear to hear you speak."

"Lady Barbara," he said again.

"God curse you!" I muttered through shut teeth.

"He was my enemy," he croaked in a voice I could not recognise.

"Oh, that I should have loved him!" I cried out wildly. "Why did you not put a bullet through this heart of mine?"

And then without further heed of him I continued to embrace the dead man's hand, and knelt there with it in my desperate grasp, oblivious of everything but the dreadful still passionate agony of

sorrow that held me. I was conscious of nothing, not even of the slow passing of the hours, not even of the cruel biting of the cold—nay, not even that the murderer had slunk from me away into the night, that friend of murder, and that I and my lover were alone.

How long I was the victim of this impotence I cannot tell, but at last I grew aware that the dawn had touched my eyes, and that with it light and sanity had returned. Truly day is the source of reason. Had the pitch of night continued for ever, for ever I must have stayed by the couch of my cold lover. But broad day was too bright and bold and fearless to countenance for an instant the madness of grief my bereaved heart was craving to wreak upon itself. Therefore I rose, stiff and numb with my perishing wintry vigil, and turned my face towards the house. But with daylight to incite it, it was most strange how instantly my sleeping blood woke, and how soon my mind was restored to its fullest faculty. Once more could I think—yea act; whilst presently my eyes forgot the moonlight and the dead man's form, and grew sensitive to detail. There were the pistols covered with hoar, and the burnt-out lanterns cold beside them. Scarce three paces from me was the murderer's crutch, and yet more strangely his gold-laced hat with the king's cockade upon it. Verily this was mystery. How he could have made off with his damaged knee unsupported required to be explained, while his discarded hat was not the less to be remarked. It is probable that my reawakened senses, rejoicing in their new activity, discovered a

latent fascination in the scene. For, certain it is that I turned back out of the purest curiosity to observe the enlightened aspect of the corpse.

It had the uniform, the shape, the entire semblance of Captain Grantley! A fit of very violent trembling seized me at that sight, and for the first time in my life, I think, I lost the almost joyous self-confidence that was wont to make me the equal of the most infinite occasion. But after the first spasm of terror and surprise, bald daylight, and the assurance of my natural disposition, asserted themselves determinedly. Whatever the stress and agony of the night, whatever the morbid hysteria that had so long corrupted me, and the awful pangs I had undergone, I was certain that now I was absolute mistress of my mind. It was impossible that my vision could be distorted now; I was compelled to believe the evidence of my eyes.

Captain Grantley was lying on his face, presumably with a bullet through his heart, for there was a blotch of black upon his bright, military coat, to indicate the manner of his death. I could see little of his countenance, yet quite enough of it to identify him plainly. Despite the slight distortion his features had undergone in the throes of death, there was no ground for doubt that it was the Captain's body that lay stone cold in the grass. There was his figure, his uniform, his powdered hair, his large, fat nose, and the bandages around one knee to convince me that I had been a most pitiable fool. What a passionate grief had I lavished on a foe! And yet, poor wretch—poor wretch! We forgive all things to the dead.

It was now that my feelings underwent a very wonderful revulsion. The knowledge that, after all, it was our declared enemy who was dead, and that the man, my lover, whom he had hunted so long and so remorselessly, was alive and at large, reinspired me with energy and hope. A vision of freedom for the fugitive and a consummation of that which I so ardently desired, took me to the house with the swiftness of the wind. If young Anthony had had the folly not to seize his chance of escape already, it remained for me to make him do so.

When I arrived the household was astir. Two of the Captain's men stood talking on the lawn with faces of much gravity. It was plain that the absence of their leader was already known, but judging by their demeanour I thought it scarcely likely that they had heard the tidings of his end. As I entered the hall, my thoughts were wholly for the prisoner. Had he escaped? Or was he retaken? Unhappily these questions were not unanswered long. Repairing straightway to the library, I discovered the rebel in the custody of Corporal Flickers and two men. He was seated at a table in the Captain's chair with all the nonchalance so peculiar to him, teasing his captors, and sipping cherry brandy in gentle quantities to reanimate his blood. There seemed a touch of the sublime in the calm manner in which he bowed to fate.

"Perhaps her ladyship can tell us," says the Corporal, regarding my appearance with great eagerness. "What's happened to the Captin, ma'am? Is it right that this ere slip o' hell's a-corpsed 'im."

"My dear man," says I with the most flattering suavity, and a pretty considerable cunning also, "if your will just step into the home meadow, you will discover for yourself your commander's desperate disposition."

"Ha, ladyship!" the Corporal answered with a grin, "I'm a rather oldish bird, you see. I've met your sort afore, my lady. You'll take care o' the prisoner, won't you, while we goes and has a look?"

"Certainly," says I, a thought sardonically perhaps, "I shall be only too happy to take care of him."

"Then you won't," says Mr. Corporal with a leer, "and that's a moral. Don't you think so, William?" William thought it was.

From this it will be seen that though the Corporal might be furnished with slightly less intelligence than his dead commander, he was a not the less determined foe.

All this time the prisoner had not received me with a single word. This was hardly to be unlooked for in the light of late events. But my brain was still in such a flutter of bewilderment regarding the awful passages in the meadow, that at first it found no reason for his taciturnity, and was inclined to resent it deeply.

Having broken a lance with Mr. Flickers, I devoted my attentions to the lad.

"Well," I bitterly began, "you have made another pretty hash of things. You are able to defeat a gold-laced captain, and one whom I believe to be as skilled an officer as any in the service of his

Majesty, and yet permit a twopenny Corporal to take you."

"Did you not call on God to curse me?" he said in a dreadful voice.

In a flash I saw in what light he had viewed my egregious behaviour. Surely it was not to be supposed that he had divined that I was the victim of the bitterest delusion! That being the case it was only possible for him to put one interpretation on my attitude, and that the most blighting to his dignity and his happiness. I saw that the mischief must be immediately repaired.

"Corporal," says I, "I must ask you and your men to withdraw to the other side the door. I have something of great privacy to communicate to Mr. Dare."

But the Corporal seemed disinclined to move. I understood his muttered reply to be to the effect that he knew his business thoroughly, and further, that he had encountered my kind before. However, I put such majesty in my look, and opened him the door with such an air, that he did my behests against the counsels of his judgment, for soldiers, of all men, cannot prevail against those accustomed to command.

In a few words, then, I calmed the riot in young Anthony. And when he saw what had been my error, and what had been his own, his eyes began to sparkle, and the sunshine came into his face.

"On my soul!" he cried, "I thought you could not be quite the she-devil that you seemed." And then with a tender gravity at the remembrance of

his impending doom: "Bab, I wish I could live and love you. I should be a model of a husband, and we'd make a pretty handsome pair."

"Well" says I, fascinated with the bravery of his countenance, "I've the very greatest mind to make a husband of you. You are the most wonderfully handsome lad, and headstrong too, and that's why I so encourage you."

"I wish there was no Tyburn Tree," says he, with wistfulness.

Thereupon I gathered all my inches up.

"Tree or no Tree," says I, "I am going to make a declaration of my policy. Day or night I will not cease in my endeavours. Only keep a stout, cheerful heart, child, and I will show you what devotion is. I'll bully or persuade, intrigue or ruffle it, but what I'll save you. I will browbeat the King, my lad, and pass a special law in Parliament, but what you shall escape the Tree. Now here's my hand on that, and mind you do not quiver until the rope is interfering with your breath."

This was braggadocio indeed, and designed maybe to brace my poor spirit up to the high fortitude that was his own. And yet, God knows, my ultimatum was sincere, and the hapless captive took it so to be.

Having thus decided on our future course, the lad suddenly fell again to gravity.

"I suppose you do not know," says he, "that your friend the Captain met his end by murder?"

"Impossible," says I, "it was a duel fought according to the laws; and that I'll swear to, because

I witnessed it. And furthermore, the Captain had first shot, and therefore the greater opportunity."

"It was none the less a murder, as I have subsequently learnt," he says, "and I can give you the murderer's name."

"His name is not Anthony Dare, I know," I answered stoutly.

"No, her name is my Lady Barbara Gossiter."

"What do you mean?" I demanded with an anger that his brutal plainness had provoked.

"Do you see this little bullet on my palm?" says he.

"Well, what have I to do with that?" I asked, "and what has that to do with murder?"

"Alas! too much," says he. "On returning from the fight I had the misfortune to discover this bullet on this very library carpet, and I wish I could misread its meaning, madam, but that I cannot do; and I'll show you why I cannot. We settled all the details in this room ere we started for the field. You know, of course, that the fight was forced upon me by the intolerable conduct of the man; but you do not know that he insisted on us firing at twelve paces to make the aim more positive. Nor do you know that he tried by all means in his power to concede the first shot to me, and that when I refused to do other than allow the falling of the coin to dictate it, he looked to the contents of his loaded weapon. Certainly I never guessed that I was to shoot an undefended adversary, but had the thought but come into my mind I could certainly have found some premonitions. Seeing me a trifle pale he begged me

to be quite at my ease, as he knew, he said, that he should be the only one to fall. And further, he wrote this hasty note, and made me promise that when he perished, according to his prophecy, I would deliver this immaculately into your hands. And now have I done so."

Forthwith he concluded his singular but solemn statement, which had evidently wrought upon his mind to a grave degree, by submitting a sealed missive to my care. With trembling fingers I tore it open, and feverishly read its contents. It said :

"My Dear Madam,—Looking at my sad case with what eyes I may, I find that I cannot be allowed to exist another day as an honourable man. I am a traitor to my King, and in so being have committed a crime against my own soul. Whatever his Majesty in his clemency may think fit to do, this is a fault I cannot pardon in myself. My dear madam, I must beg you to believe that I do not advertise this to you that I may wound your delicacies or give you one solitary pang; but in the interests of my weak brethren I implore you, as an old friend, not to employ those marvellous advantages Nature has given you for the advancement of your private purposes. It is not just, nor is it worthy of the innate humanity of your character. But I will do you at least the kindness to admit that even in this melancholy case of mine my death this morning will add yet another lustre to your terrible, triumphant name. And now, my dear madam, permit me to give you a simple but cordial farewell;

my comedy is played.—J.G.—*Post scriptum*—This paper is delivered into the care of your lover, who, by the way, is so proper a youth that I pray you to deal gently with him.—J.G.”

I read this subtly-phrased epistle with a burning face, and then read it for the second time, perhaps to discover some mitigation in the severity of the harsh indictment. But no; his death was at my door, and something of a cold fear crept into my soul.

Presently I gave the paper to my lover, and told him to acquaint himself therewith.

“My lad,” says I, “I believe that I have slain a very admirable man.”

Having read the dead man's words, he tossed the paper from him, and eyed me fiercely with the most indignant face.

“Bab,” he said “I hate you for this! His blood is most surely on your head; and it would be but common justice if his corpse still haunts you o' nights when you are a fear-ridden hag of a hundred winters.”

I made no answer to his blame, for remorse was poisoning my heart.

“Yes,” says he, “this was a very proper man. But cheer up, Bab, for when all is claimed, I think that you are a very proper woman too, and I am going to forgive you for your wickedness.” Thereupon he rose briskly from his chair, came to my side, and kissed me right properly, with never a sign of ceremonial. I was in no condition to reprove his impudent assumption, and perhaps had

I been, I might have found it scarcely possible to do so, for his behaviour was the most wonderful proof, I thought, of his magnanimity.

"Now cheer up, Bab," he said; "but I wish that you damned women would keep your claws more regularly trimmed. You are just like soft, tame, pretty pussycats, that go a-hunting the dear harmless birds. You will not keep your paws down; you love to flesh 'em; and, well, if you slay the dear harmless creature, the dear harmless creature's slain, and there's an end on't. You are sure that you did not mean to do it, and it's a great pity that you did, and had you thought it would have torn it so, sure you would not a done it for a golden pound. But as he's dead let his end be dignified, so put down twopence for some masses for his soul!"

"You may gibe," said I miserably, "but I would that I were not the wicked wretch I am!"

And I sat down tearful, and in a truly repentant mind, for I could not rid my brain of the unholy image of that poor, pale man stark upon the meadow-sward.

"His death was prettier than ever was his life," said Anthony still musing on the tragic theme. "For at least he sold his country."

"But at what cost did he cede it?" I demanded fiercely. "And who spurred him to the deed?"

"That is what I never will enquire," says he; and the pledge accompanying this sweet speech was of such a gentle consolation that rapture softened my keenest pangs.

Until that moment I did not know what a tender

and a faithful heart might do. 'Twas good to feel that a man was mine who could recognise my crime, and yet was strong enough to pardon me for its commission. But like the very female creature that I surely am, I did not pause to consider then that this crime had been committed for the sake of the hero who had condoned it with such a lordly magnanimity.

CHAPTER XIX.

I SUFFER GREAT ADVERSITY.

OF our cruel parting I shall speak little. During the forenoon the soldiers buried their commander in the rude military way. Few were the honours that attended him, and perhaps fewer still the tears. But mine were with him, and also a remorse that I have never yet outlived. That he deserved to die, even as he did, I know; for the world has no room for weakness in a man, and, verily, this poor Captain was the very slave of his. And yet!—was there not ever the great “And yet!” attached to this poor man’s character? His mind was powerful; and better, far, his heart was true. He would have been a fitting guardian for the finest woman of us all; a tender lover, an unswerving friend, wise, temperate, of the cream of chivalry withal. I had slain a very pretty man to gain my private ends—I, who, in my ignorance had declared that the world held no men whatever!

At two of the clock that afternoon the soldiers started on their London journey with the prisoner in their care. The admonition that I gave to my young lover was of this nature:

“Child, do not despair until you are writhing in the rope. I, Bab Gossiter, have sworn to save you,

and you know my power. I will accost the King ; I will browbeat his Justices ; I will intimidate his Parliament rather than you shall grin through a halter at the dirty populace. Remember that I love you, and that love unaided can overthrow the devil. Be of good heart then, and continue in that most excellent way of yours of taking a quart of old ale and a solid pound of rump steak to your breakfast. As for your prayers, I would have you invariably conclude 'em in this manner : 'And, O God, do you bless my dearest Bab, for she has sworn to deliver me from this most horrid prison, that she may make a right proper husband of me to the end that my state may be exchanged to a sweeter bondage than this present one.' "

At these words his fine eyes danced with a laugh which said how inflexible his courage was. Afterwards he mounted his horse and rode towards the moors in the society of his captors. As his form receded slowly among the trees, and my spirits ceased to be encouraged by his robust bearing and the jaunty waving of his hat, an impending cloud blotted the December sun and darkened the whole of earth.

It was then I felt my heart sink. Only for a moment though, for the high buoyancy of its resolves were sufficient to support it. There was work to do, and work, I take it, is the true elixir, the secret of everlasting energy. In order to repress my tears, and to defeat a very natural tendency to such-like female squeamishness, I began at once to prosecute the matter.

The Earl, my papa, was the earliest victim of this

fanatical determination. Poor Anthony had not left the place an hour, ere I repaired to the apartment of his lordship. The dear, good old gentleman was exactly in the posture that I had anticipated seeing him; to wit, he was propped up in cushions beside the fire, with divers cellarets of liquor at a little table ready to his hand, of which he was for the nonce utterly unheedful, having a nicer dissipation to enjoy. A handkerchief was spread across his face, and right lustily was he snoring, this being the hour of his post-prandial nap—a performance he undertook far more religiously than he ever did his prayers.

“Wake up, my dear,” says I, for my eagerness was such that it would brook delay from none. Therefore I flicked away his lordship’s handkerchief, and with my little finger did tickle tenderly his ancient chin.

“Go ’way, you flies!” he grunted, “and damn you!”

However, his nose being presently attacked, the old gentleman’s annoyance grew so imperative that he shook his face, and was just about to fall into a great volubility of language, when his eyes came open, and the sight of me immediately curtailed it. For the politest man of his time was out of his chair bowing and apologising ere one might wink, expressing with his hand over his heart his delight at my appearance, and his sincere appreciation of the honour that a visit from my fair self conferred upon him.

“And, my dearest lady,” he concluded, rubbing his drowsy eyes, “if there is one thing you would have me perform, I shall esteem it a privilege to

perform it, for at this moment you behold me quite as much as formerly the servant—nay, the slave—of beauty, youth, wisdom and wit. But first, dear madam, I beseech you to accept a chair."

"Papa," says I, plunging straight into the business that had brought me, "I have a few surprises for you. First, I think you are acquainted with the name of a certain Mr. Dare, a very arrant rebel?"

"I am," says he, "and to my sorrow."

"Well, my lord," says I, "they have now retaken this person, and he is bound for Tyburn even now."

"Very glad indeed to hear it," says my lord, right heartily. "And had this been the case a week ago, I should have been spared some shattering of sleep."

The old gentleman here regarded me with a singular twinkling keenness that required great sturdiness to meet.

"Very nice of you, my lord, to cherish such sentiments as these toward my future husband," says I, with the most brazen boldness.

"Your future what!" cries out my lord, jumping up as though some imp had stuck a pin into his chair.

"My future husband," says I, winningly.

For the best part of a minute a highly comic silence took him. His brow was puckered into creases, as is the way when one is seeking for a jest that is concealed.

"Ha! ha!" he cackled presently, "very good jest indeed, my dear, very good indeed!"

"I am sure I am charmed, my lord, that you appreciate it," I says, "but I have my doubts

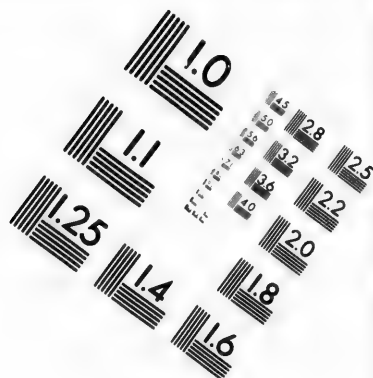
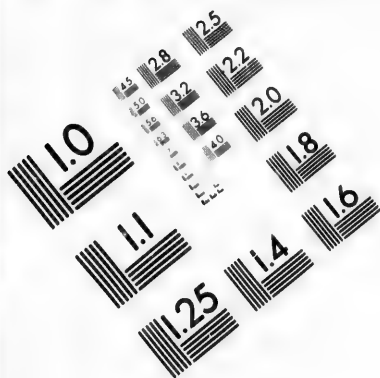
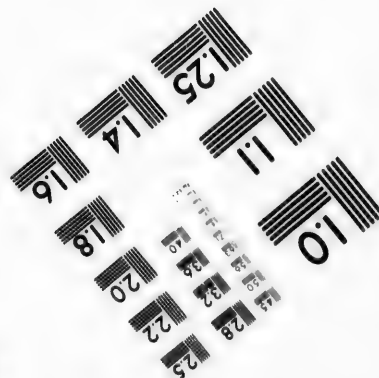
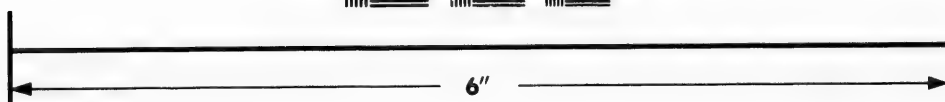
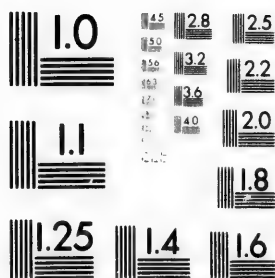


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whether this affair is quite such a jest for poor young Mr. Anthony."

"Not if you marry him, I daresay," says his lordship naughtily.

"Well my lord," says I, "just to be as brief as possible, I desire you to see his Majesty at once and procure my future husband's pardon."

My lord took forth a red silk handkerchief and slowly wiped his wig.

"This comes of excessive beauty in a daughter," he commented. "Lord, 'tis a mercy to have 'em plain. My dear child, go and put a powder in your milk and sleep off this attack. Frankly, I do not like it. Or stay, shall I send for Paradise? It were well, perhaps, an your tongue were instantly inspected."

"Papa," says I, with awful gravity, "you appear to forget that the first duty of a parent is to be obedient. I command you, sir, to get you to town by to-morrow morning's mail."

"'Pon my soul and honour!" coughed his lordship, "this is really——"

"My lord," says I, "must I repeat that I command you? I love young Anthony, and therefore am I going to marry him."

"He has a birth, of course?" says this wriggling aristocrat.

"Not he," says I, "left one night on the doorstep of a priory. Doubtless a bastard of the gutter scum. Even his name is not his own. Hath no more than threepence-halfpenny and a pair of ragged breeches to his fortune. Hath stood in prison

several times and adorned the pillory and the whipping-post on various occasions. In short, my lord, he is the sauciest rogue that ever kissed a maid against her inclination. And, faith, I believe the very raggedest!"

"And you say you are going to marry him?"

"My lord, I have sworn to marry him."

"But, my dear lady, this is really too preposterous. I think you had better talk it over with your aunt."

The unexpected mention of that dame was perilously like cold water to my courage. But a little fortitude overcame my qualms.

"No need to appeal to the family, my lord," I said, with arrogance; "I don't care fourpence for 'em, and never did. As for the dowager, my aunt, I hate her; and I am indulging in great hopes that this miserable match will make her very ill."

"But, my dearest girl, I beseech you to condescend to a little reason."

"Oh, if it comes to reason, sir," I blithely reassured him, "I have sufficient reason to advance with which to endow two sciences."

"We'll hear it, then, under your permission."

"It's simply that I love the man, my lord. He's the finest lad you ever saw; a person of tenacity and kindness, of sagacity and courage, of simplicity and wit. He would die for me to-morrow, yet he would correct me in an error, and have the magnanimity to forgive me for a crime. In short, my lord, he is the very husband I've been pining for this five-and-twenty years, and, my lord, let me tell you in confidence that this is the husband that I am going

to marry, an I must burn Newgate to the ground to achieve the consummation. He's as sparkling as the sunshine, and keen as the shrewd east wind."

"But insufficient in his pedigree," my lord groaned, and it was really ridiculously piteous to witness his drawn, white countenance.

"My dearest Bab," says he directly, and with a simple gentleness that was appealing, "pray allow me to give you a little counsel. I pray you for heaven's sake dismiss this folly! I beg you to abstain from so terrible an error."

"Papa," says I, curtly, "I have a chin." And out I juttet it, and dipped my forefinger in the dimple in it, which dimple is worth about two thousand sighs a year, they tell me.

"Yes," says his lordship, sadly, "you *have* a chin. It was bequeathed you by your late mamma. She was the celebrated lady who on one occasion did box the ears of the Prince of Wales. I believe that on one or two occasions also she interfered with mine. A very pearl of women, mind, with the beauty of an angel, but she could be a domestic terror if she chose."

"But, my lord, I understand that if she so much as held her little finger up, you were wonderful docile and obedient?"

"I was never guilty of the discourtesy of thwarting a woman in her whims."

"And in your age you will not be so, I am certain, else the world will say you are arrived at your decrepitude," I cum ingly replied.

"You really think they will?" his lordship gasped.

"I am as certain of it as I am uncertain of my future state," says I with fervour. "And if you order the chaise for twenty after six to-morrow, you will catch the nine o'clock from York with ease."

"'Tis horrible cold at that unseasonable hour these winter mornings," says the old man nervously.

"The journey will do you more good than six physicians," says I, with the sturdiest conviction. "And when his Majesty receives so old a friend, tears of joy will fill his eyes; and when he learns the exceeding mercy of the errand that hath brought you, his compassion for you will be such, that 'pon my soul I think he'll weep upon your neck. And I believe he'll lend us the Royal Chapel to be married in. And faith, my lord, what if he gave away the bride!"

The dear old gentleman, who never could find it in his heart to deny us women anything, was visibly shaken by my ruddy eloquence and the excited flashing of my eyes.

"But these winter mornings are most harsh towards us men of middle age," says he.

"My dear papa," says I, "your years sit so neatly on you that it is the height of affectation for you to claim the least infirmity. Now I will see that you retire at nine o'clock this evening; I will have your man prepare your baggage, and see that he puts a water-bottle in the chaise. Leave everything to me, my dear papa, and depend upon it you shall start for town at twenty after six to-morrow, as blithely as you did upon your wedding morning. But sir, there is one thing that you must promise

me: not a word to my most admirable aunt. A long course of theology and smelling salts hath perverted the original poetry of her soul."

His lordship promised gallantly, but quite as much, I think, from a fear of Lady Caroline as from his natural disposition to oblige me. Having once wrung a kind of tottering consent from the old, reluctant gentleman, I was at great pains to keep him to his word. I planned everything relating to his journey with the greatest perspicacity and promptitude, nor did I omit to advise his lordship of the fact. But I had to confess to my private mind that my faith was not too great in my ambassador, who, from age and his habit of indolence, might not conduct my cause with a liveliness that would readily sway his Majesty. Therefore I took a piece of paper and drew up the heads of what I considered his behaviour ought to be in the presence of the King, and hoped that as they were so explicitly recorded he would duly follow them. The paper ran, I think, somewhat to this tenour: Obtain audience after his Majesty hath dined, for the sake of his temper's condition; inquire after his health with concern—if it be strong, let your solicitude be quite visible; if it be weak, tell him in a hearty voice that you never saw him looking better in his life, and that you never knew a doctor yet who was not a fool providing he was not a rogue. Casually introduce the beauty and the amiability of his children; if his Majesty attempt a jest, laugh heartily; if he undertake a story, do not by any chance have heard it previously, and encourage him with your applause long before it culminates; if he adventure a pun,

flick forth your handkerchief to take away appreciative tears; if he be glum, avoid theology and politics; if he offer snuff, accept the most moderate of pinches (he is a Guelph, you know), and be horribly careful that you do not drop a grain on the carpet or his breeches; be charmed with the rarity and the beauty of the box, and if it prove a present from the Queen, comment on the chastity of her taste—if you carry a better in your fob do not exhibit it; tell him casually that your daughter Bab is devoted to him, and contrive to let him know what the poets think about *her* (even kings cannot withstand the devotion of fair women)—tell him that she has five pictures of him to adorn her chamber, then pave the way with compliments and caution for the business of your visit.

I insisted on his lordship's retiring that evening very early, and after a pretty moderate potation. Having bribed his man to have his master wound up and set in motion at an hour that astonished him, I retired also. The following morning at the stroke of five I was in the hands of Emblem, and a little later was personally superintending the departure of my emissary. Long before my aunt appeared at eight o'clock I had got my lord upon his journey.

You may divine with what impatience I awaited his return. I might be distrustful of his years, but regarding the considerable figure that he made at Court, and the power he wielded, I never entertained a doubt. Besides, he had a tact quite wonderful in a man, and a power of soft persuasion that was irresistible as music. And I knew the dear good

soul to be devoted to me, and incapable of thwarting my most unreasonable whims.

An intolerable fortnight passed before my lord was back again. He had hardly time to doff his travelling suit ere I was besieging him with my anxious questions. But it was very sad news he brought me.

"My dear child," he told me tenderly, "I wish to spare you all pain that is unnecessary, but I regret to say that there is really nothing to be done. His Majesty refused to see me."

"His Majesty refused to see you!" I cried out. His words had put a pitiful commotion in my heart.

"Unhappily," he says, "these Yorkshire irregularities of ours have by some means become the property of the town, and the whole family is in terrible disgrace; and, I might add, would have been in some degree of peril but for the merciful recovery of the rebel."

"Indeed," says I, inconsequently, and then observed a miserable silence for a while.

"You see, my poor dear child," the old worldling said, "one cannot hope to plunge one's finger in the smoking pie of politics without getting that finger burned. I am very sorry for you, but I can no more save your friend than I can sway the eternal forces."

"Have you seen the Parliament men, my lord—Walpole, Harley, and the rest?"

"Yes; and quite against their several inclinations," he replied. "They felt it to be highly indiscreet to receive one who was out of favour. As for lending their assistance, I can assure you, child, that they know their business better."

"How monstrous of them!" I broke out; "a set of water-blooded wretches, who will not help their friends!"

"Ah, but we are not their friends now; we are out of favour." The ancient courtier said this lightly, but I knew that his heart was groaning. He had passed his gay years bathed in the sunshine of applause and popularity; it was bitter that his end should be a dark night of contumely and neglect. Nothing could be more cruel or more wounding to this polished and successful man of fashion. Yet it amazed me to see how finely he took these rebuffs of fortune. His courage sat on him like a shining suit of mail. It filled my heart with tears to witness such cheerful bravery in the aged and the infirm.

"Well, papa," says I, turning to speech as a remedy against the weakness that strove to so insidiously reduce me, "I have sworn to save young Anthony, and never yet have I proved unequal to my word."

"'Tis never too late to create a precedent," says the Earl, "nor to enjoy a new experience. I have lived many years, but it is not until to-day that I have tasted the coldness of the world."

"I have always averred, you know," says I, with misfortune spurring me to my customary petulance; "that these sauer-kraut chewing boors from Hanover have no more breeding than a certain native beastliness that enables them to become like pigs, offensive to creatures of a nicer mind. But, after all, wit is the superior of power; and if I cannot find a means whereby to thwart 'em, I must be content to lose the

only husband I ever can accept. I will start for town to-morrow morning."

"No, don't do that," says his lordship hastily; "I am sure it will be very ill advised. Pray wait until this cloud is over-blown. You are too much of a butterfly, my pretty lady, not to discover the shade exceeding cruel to endure. You will find London very blighting, I assure you."

But I was unheedful, and the more particularly when I was told that poor Anthony had undergone his trial already, and that at that hour he lay in Newgate under extreme sentence, which awaited execution on the 24th of May.

It was now the 2nd of that month. It will thus be seen how little time there was to lose. Three weeks and a day were left in which to procure his deliverance; not by any means too adequate a period in which to accomplish so involved a deed, even had I had the ghost of an idea as to the manner of its consummation.

To remain at Cleebby the slave of despair and bitterness would certainly be fatal to my lover; therefore, quitting my dubious papa, I hied immediately to Emblem and bade her pack my baggage. On the morrow I was speeding to the south, evolving as I went all sorts of mad schemes in my brain for the achievement of so desperate an end.

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CHAPTER XX.

I SPEAK WITH THE CELEBRATED MR. SNARK.

ON arriving at our town residence in Bloomsbury, it was easy to ascertain that the family of Long Acre had fallen on an evil time. The troops of friends that formerly were so willing to receive and to be received now kept aloof, and avoided me in every way possible, as though I were a very leper. At first I felt disposed to accept this calmly, and in an amused but not uncharitable spirit. I persuaded myself that I could surely dispense with the favour of these shallow persons. But one week of it corrected this impression. For I soon discovered that flattery, admiration, and wholesale triumphs in the social sphere were indispensable to a life in town. Nature, in endowing me with a smile that, as young Anthony once remarked, was "sufficient to sweeten sour cream," and a beauty of person that provoked more odes than a successful campaign, also cursed me with a craving for its appreciation. Therefore in a day or two, when the novelty was outworn, disfavour and neglect became terribly irksome to support. And however proud a face I might put upon the matter when I went abroad, my pain was not thereby made the softer.

It seems that the story had flown across the town with the quickness peculiar to a scandal, that our

family had been so active in the cause of the Pretender Charles, that it had gone the length of harbouring rebels at our place in Yorkshire, and had even plucked them from the custody of the Hanoverian's troops. Further, it was known that the King had refused the *entrée* to my father and myself, and soon a sinister rumour crept abroad to the effect that the Earl's name was to be cited in the House of Lords, he being guilty of a capital offence. Truly I found things in London to be dark indeed. It was evident from the first that it would be impossible to seek in high places for aid for the man lying under sentence of death in Newgate. It was this ulterior assistance that I had relied on wholly; and now for it to be quite beyond my reach, was a great aggravation to my miseries. Shorn of this privilege of the powerful, I knew not which way I must turn, and in a week or less was at my wits' end for an expedient. At that time my lover had only ten days to live, and here was I with nothing done. Where were my promises? The agony that was mine during those fast-slipping days I do not care to dwell on. Every hour that passed was a reproach to my futility. The suspense, the misery, the vain repinings as I searched for a means and could not find one, whilst the days all too rapidly escaped, fretted me almost to the fever-state. By night I could not sleep; yet by day I could accomplish nothing. Shunned and scorned by all who had the power to help me; fettered by the horrid disabilities of petticoats, and the most sheer ignorance of how to achieve so grave and dangerous a consummation, there seemed nothing left for me to do, other than

to await, with what fortitude I might, the rebel's awful end. But this I could not do.

To farther aggravate my woes, some dear friend of mine contrived that the news should be borne to my ears that the town was in full possession of the fact that I was deeply in love with a certain tattered adventurer and rogue lying under sentence of death in Newgate, and that I was surely sickening with the thoughts of his impending doom. Although I deeply doubt whether this story was actually accepted, it was not the less industriously circulated because there happened to be a doubt about it. I laughed bitterly when I reflected how unwittingly near they had approached the truth.

When I rose, weary and unrefreshed one morning, and reflected that there were only nine days left, I grew utterly desperate. But in the course of that night's intolerable vigil, I had conceived the semblance of an idea. Therefore, while Mrs. Polly ministered to me, I proceeded to put it into a somewhat more palpable shape.

"Emblem," says I, "I have been wondering lately whether there is a rogue in all this city, who, if liberally paid for his devotion, would render me some honest services."

"Would not a man of rectitude be able to perform these services?" says she.

"That's the rub, for he would be unwilling," I replied, and when I went a point farther and explained the nature of them, Mrs. Emblem agreed with this opinion.

"Well, your la'ship," says she, with a brave

fidelity for which I was truly grateful; "if such a one is to be found, you can take it that I'll find him."

"Then you are a dear, good soul," I told her warmly, for surely it was encouraging to know that I had one friend in a world of enemies.

I never enquired too deeply into the means that were adopted to procure the services of the celebrated Mr. Snark. How Mrs. Polly Emblem came to hear of him at all, or in what manner she contrived to coax him from his remote and modest lodging in the Ratcliff Highway, from whence for years he had defied the whole of Bow Street to dislodge him, history hath not deponed unto this present. Yet from the moment the dear, devoted Mrs. Polly made that promise to me on that morning of culminating miseries, she never ceased to strive to make herself the equal of her resolution. Some hours later she came to me and said :

"I've just heard of the very man, your la'ship. He's not a very religious man, your la'ship, but he's an awful knowing one, they say."

Thereupon she dispatched more than one emissary to scour the most questionable haunts in London for him, and every hour or so the honest creature brought me very excellent reports to restore me to a cheerful spirit.

"Mr. Anthony's as good as delivered," she would say in the most optimistic manner. "I am most positively certain of it—yes, I am ! I'm told that this Mr. Snark's a perfect wonder. They say he is as clever as the devil, only that he charges rather more. But I know it's not money you'll begrudge him !"

"Rather not," says I. "Let him but deliver my dearest Anthony, and I'll give him my estate in Berkshire."

I can well recall this celebrated person and the mode of his appearance. It was somewhat late in the evening of the sixteenth of the month that he came in great privacy to visit me. He was ushered into my boudoir and presented by the triumphant Mrs. Polly Emblem.

"This be the gentleman, your la'ship," says she, whilst the gentleman in question ducked and grinned.

In the dimness of the lamp I could just discern a man, extraordinary small, drest with a plain respectability, and had a pair of eyes set very close, and small and hard and twinkling as chips of glass. And such was the peril of my state of mind, and so precarious was the deed with which I was about to charge him, that I was quite rejoiced when I saw that Mr. Snark had a face of the most finished and perfect villainy. Here was a man that I might trust instinctively with any crime.

At first I was uncertain as to the precise fashion of my address, because the affair demanded something of delicacy on the side of both. But in regard to talk it was plain that I must look for no assistance from my visitor, who appeared to be of the essence of discretion. Besides, he was far too occupied in running his eyes about the room, apparently with the object of making a complete inventory of all the articles therein. At last I spoke :

"You are Mr. Snark, I understand?" I said, somewhat clumsily, I fear.

"Call me plain Snark," says he, with his horrid little eyes glistening at a golden candlestick.

"Well, Mr. Plain Snark," I nervously began, and then stopped and whispered urgently to Mrs. Emblem: "For heaven's sake stay here and keep your eye upon him! If I were to be left alone with him I'm certain that inside twenty minutes he would strangle me, pawn the furniture, and sell my body to the surgeons!"

The ears of my visitor were so acute, it seemed, that they must have caught a hint of what I said, for he looked at me and remarked with considerable emphasis and pride:

"Snark mayn't be a picture-book to look at, not a Kneller as it were, but he's a bit of a hartiss in 'is 'umble way. And modest, too, is good old Snark. He'd no more use cold cream and lavender for to beautify his skin than he'd rob a orphan boy."

Yet as he spoke his eyes still travelled over me and my belongings in a fashion that made me wish already that I could forget him as one does an evil dream. But there was most instant business to transact, and to fail to do it now was to forfeit the life of one exceeding dear. Therefore this thought gave me the courage to say:

"I have sent for you, Mr. Snark, in the hope that you will undertake a delicate matter on my behalf; a most delicate matter, I might say."

"A reg'lar tantaliser, as it were?" says Mr. Snark.

"Yes," says I, "a regular tantaliser, Mr. Snark."

"Well, now you know," says Mr. Snark, "Snark's

blue death on tentalisers—a plain job's not a bit o' good to Snark. There's lot's o' the perfession can undertake a plain job just as well as Snark, and charges lesser. But in the higher branches, as they says at Bow Street, there's none like good old Snark. Why, that man fair takes a pride in the higher branches. Just look at the case o' William Milligan. Talk about hartistic! Why, Miss, the case of William Milligan was the wonder o' the age."

"And, pray, who was William Milligan?" I asked in my hasty ignorance.

"Never heard o' William Milligan? Stop my vitals, is this England?"

And then he turned to Emblem.

"Now then, Mary Jane, pipe up, just for to tell the lady who was William Milligan!"

The luckless Mrs. Polly shook her head, turned pale, and clutched a chair.

"What, never heard o' William Milligan?" says he. "Come, now, I call that good. Strike me purple! you'll tell me next that you've never heard o' Peter Pearce and Johnny Margitts, and Joe the Tinker, and Ridin' Phipps o' Finsbury. Every mother's son on 'em in 'Newgate Calendar,' wi' their picters draw'd from the life fair, speakin' natural, and all their pedigrees beneath. And you never to a' heard of William Milligan? What, never heard o' Bagshot Bill—old Bully William—wot in his prime would stop a beautiful fat bishop on the Heath and strip him of his duds. Why, Snark, you're learnin'."

"Oh, a highwayman, was he?" said I most inadvisedly.

"Well, Miss," says he, "I should rather think he were. He was a reg'lar poet at it, William was. Not a very big man, Miss, William wasn't, mind you, but by crumbs! see him on his mare wi' the moon arisin' and a coach a-comin' down the hill. They can talk about their hartisses, and their Shakespeares, and their Drydens too, but, Miss, that's what I calls a poet and a man. And William were that modest too. Not a smell o' pride about him. 'Ud take his pot and have his jest wi' me and you just as if he were a common person."

"Oh, no; surely not?" says I in an earnest accent.

"Lord, he would, Miss! That's what's so grand about true greatness. All the real Number One men are as mild and silken as a clergyman. Perky Niblick treated me to a pot o' porter the day afore he so gloriously died. And Jackson, too; look at Jackson, the very height of the perfession, but as meek in private as a child. Used to bring lollipops for my youngkers every time he come to sup. But to return to Snark. It was that benevolent individual wot delivered William Milligan when they was a-cartin' him to Tyburn Tree. An' he did it out o' love alone, did excellent old Snark; never took a penny for the delivery o' William, for it's wonderful what tenderness one true hartiss has towards a brother."

"I've always noticed that," says I; "truly a very noble trait."

"Now don't you talk like that, Miss," says the

recipient of this flattery, "for Snark's that modest that it makes him blush up like a girl."

"Well, Mr. Snark," says I, to stay the tide of his loquacity and to rid myself of the embarrassment of his presence, "please let me tell you in as few words as I can what I have sent for you to do."

It was remarkable to observe the change that then came over him. He listened to all I said with the most polite attention, his small eyes twinkling, and his wicked face keen and tense, with a concentrated interest. When I had finished he put a few sharp questions as to the status of the prisoner.

"Who is this rebel?" he began. "Important man at all? Done much? Any reppitation? Never know'd at all in the Highway or the Lane?"

"He is very young at present," I replied, "but you will doubtless one day hear of him as Prime Minister of England. For he's a wonderful fine fellow, and of a very alert intelligence."

"Hum, on'y a Prime Minister!" says Mr. Snark. "But will they put him in the Calendar? And do you think he's worth my time and trouble, Miss?"

"Why, my dear man," says I, "I can surely make it worth your time and trouble. You have merely to name the sum."

Herein it was that I committed an unpardonable crime.

"Pah! and pish!" he cried, and waved his hand with magnificent disdain. "Do you suppose that it is your dirty money that I've come for? It's not guineas that can make a Snark, young lady, nor guineas that

can command him. There's on'y one Snark as they knows at Bow Street, and he's not the man to interest hisself in small fry. His very last deliverance was no less than Jimmy Finch. All the world has heard o' Bos-eyed Jimmy, but this here rebel man o' yours has got his name to make. An' Jimmy's was a job an all. I never seed a cleaner. Four deep o' soldiers round the scuffle, an' a blessed barricade. An' James was prayin' white as cheese, but awful full o' pluck. An' there there was the topsman a fingering the noose. By gum, Miss, it was beautiful! And when my boys had done the job, you should just a' heard the crowd a' whispering: "This is a bit o' Snark's work. Marvellous man, old Snark!" And then you comes to Snark, Miss, and says you can make it worth his trouble! Why, Snark's that stiff, Miss, that he wouldn't deliver the King of England if he hadn't the desire."

Now it was pretty plain that I had not adopted a sufficient humility of tone towards the celebrated Mr. Snark. Therefore did I speed to change my tactics, and now besought his aid with great and meek solicitude. This so far succeeded that, presently, he unbent sufficiently to say that three hundred pounds would be his fee, payable forthwith. This latter clause was something of a shock. To trust persons of his kidney with their pay before they earn it, is generally fatal to their promises. Yet Mr. Snark's high reputation had made him in every way so jealous of it, and so sensitive to any slight upon his pride, that it was impossible to demur to his demand and yet keep him in an accommodating humour. Therefore

with a sinking heart did I conclude the bargain, and repose my faith in that incalculable Providence that presides over all natural affairs. So soon as the money was jingling in his hands he prepared to take his leave.

"Thank ye, Miss," says he; "but don't forget that Snark conducts this matter at a sacrifice. He likes your solid, hearty buxom face, which is the reason for his kindness. For it's Snark's opinion that this young rebel man o' yours is on'y a beginner, and that his picter won't be put into the Calendar. But let me see now. The execution is fixed up for the twenty-sixth at ten o'clock in the morning. Well, that'll suit Snark handsomely. An' I daresay it'll be a pretty fashionable thing. Shall you be present, Miss?"

"Yes," says I, "I have engaged the second floor of No. 14 in the Square.

"No. 14, is it?" says he, with so acute a promptness that it was a proof that he was competent in all the details of his trade. "No. 14—why, that's a Providence! It's passage goes through to Piper's Alley. Now if you take my advice, Miss, you'll have the best horse in London waiting there at ten o'clock. You can leave the rest to Snark, Miss."

"Will you engage the Dover boat?" I asked.

"Yes," says he, "that's all in the three hundred, and the blessed crew that's a-going for to sail it. An' there's no need to look so white about it either. Your rebel's just as good as saved. It's mere nut-cracking to old Snark. He's effected twenty-nine deliverances in all parts o' the world."

"But pray don't forget, sir," says I, anxiously, "that he is sure to be guarded dreadful strong. The Government consider him as highly dangerous, and they know that he hath some influential friends.

"Well, I reckon, Miss," says he, "that they'll want three full regiments o' the line to keep him clear o' Snark."

A short time afterwards my whimsical visitor took his leave. When he had gone, my meditations were remarkable. It was impossible to place an absolute reliance in this ingenious person, yet none the less his character and appearance had inspired me with confidence enough to repose some hope in his professions. And verily, for better or for worse the die was cast, and if at the last this Mr. Snark should leave me in the lurch, the rebel would inevitably perish. This was the only source that I might look to for his merciful deliverance. Every other door was resolutely shut.

It was quite a painful thing to observe the cheerfulness that possessed poor Mrs. Polly. From this time until the execution day she was never tired of informing me of her firm conviction that dear, kind Mr. Snark would not fail us, and that sweet, young Mr. Anthony was as good as free. But it was absurd to see the creature's red and swollen eyes, which her invincible smiling altogether failed to hide. And presently this parody of courage grew so intolerable to my nerves, that even allowing for the tenderness of her intentions, I was fain to cry out upon her for a cheat, and recommended her to desist from these malpractices.

This was a time indeed, which I hope Heaven in its mercy will not again inflict upon me. What I endured, would, I can assert, have wrecked a woman of less fibre and tenacity. Nearly all my thoughts were centred in the cell of the condemned; and at least their concentration spared them something of the bitterness of another matter, which must otherwise have keenly hurt them—I mean the cruel behaviour of the world in which I dwelt. No equipages drove up to our house in Bloomsbury. No chair-men laid their burdens down before our doors. If I took a short excursion in the park, the most intimate of my acquaintances either saw me not, or, seeing me, bowed stiffly and passed on in a studied silence. In particular my kind women friends appeared to derive a sincere happiness from what they were pleased to call my downfall. The scornful gladness of their looks was wonderful, and yet also terrible; for alas! what could be the condition of the stony hearts from which they did proceed? Then it was that I remembered how short a time ago I was one of these contemptibles.

“Emblem,” says I, on the execution eve, with hope born apparently of misery’s excesses; “I have done with town and the Court, and all this ridiculous world of fashion. They are very barbarous affairs! When I wed my Anthony I will be the pattern of an attentive spouse. I will be his cheerful slave and his most devoted friend. But I’ll not forego ambition neither. I will train and educate him until he doth become a veritable power in the realm. For I mean to be the wife of my lord Secretary Dare, and then, my

Emblem, I'll turn all these dear women friends of mine just green with jealousy. Yet, in my pride, I will not trample on them, as they trample now on me, but will deal with 'em graciously, and ask 'em to my routs among the ambassadors and potentates, and prove thereby that I am not a cherisher of malice, but a creature of a gentler temper than themselves."

Yet here, having indulged these harmless speculations to the full, I recalled with terror the most horrid condition of my case. What would the morrow bring? Death, perhaps, and the shattering of my hopes. But these cold forebodings I determined to avoid, and contrived to do so in a measure, for a new matter had come lately to my ears which wooed my mind a little from its dark premonitions. The fact that I had been a supreme favourite, and a trifle arrogant, perhaps, in the hour of my pride, had caused the whole town to exult at my disfavour. The cause of that disfavour was well known to be rooted in my behaviour towards the desperate rebel whom on the morrow the King was going to hang. And it was further argued that his death of shame would aggravate my humiliation.

Judge, then, of the sensation that was created when it was positively known that I had engaged the largest and most adjacent window in the square that I might be present at the execution! Yea, and in the desperation of the hour I even went a point farther. I issued invitations to as many of my friends as the window would accommodate to come and share the gruesome sight with me. This was a very thunderbolt. And though they said among them-

selves: "the brazenness of Lady Bab really is incredible," they were quite unable to resist the fascination and delightfulness of the whole affair. Therefore they accepted with alacrity. And though I knew this to be by far the boldest stroke I had ever played, not for an instant did I falter, nor doubt my native resolution.

CHAPTER XXI.

I COME TO TYBURN TREE.

"SEVEN of the clock, your la'ship!"
I opened my heavy eyes, saw Emblem's pale face, then shuddered.

"Hope you've slept well," says the maid, in a way that told me that, whatever I had done, she certainly had not.

"Remarkably," says I, determined to practise for the terrible exhibition of fortitude that I must display. "If all those dear friends of mine have slept as properly, they will need to have less powder on than usual. And now, my Emblem," says I, taking the cup of chocolate from her, "mind that you dress me to the utmost of your art. Not a stitch must be out of place. My head-dress must be a marvel of perfection, and put 'em in a towering rage. And I'll wear the plum-coloured taffety, faced with pink. Or stay, I'll have a more sanguine colour; I think it should well consort with an interesting paleness."

"You have a black velvet that will do beautifully, my lady. Yet you do not wish to wear a mourning air?"

"No, girl," says I, "anything save that. Pale, but spirited, you know, as one who confronts adversity,

yet sets her foot upon it. For to-day, if all things fail, I am persuaded that I'll receive my enemies and outface them every one."

I was robed, therefore, with much care; and it pleased me, and also braced my resolution up, to know that my personal charms could not have been displayed to more delicate advantage. I knew that to meet the fierce eyes of my enemies would be the severest ordeal that I had undergone; and yet I did not shrink, but rejoiced rather in the self-elected task. They would expect to see me spiritless and crushed with woe; for they were not aware that I meant to shew them what a fortitude was mine. None the less, the time that intervened between now and the coming of the coach that was to bear me to the final scene of all was passed in morbidity and wretchedness. For several days I had sent letters of vague comfort and encouragement to young Anthony, yet the Governor of Newgate refused to allow them to be delivered, and had sent them back again. And now at the last, as the rebel must be ignorant of the efforts I was making, I became haunted with the fear that he might have made an attempt upon his life, for I was certain that, to a person of his high temper, any death was preferable to the one he was doomed to undergo. And then there was the sincerity of Mr. Snark, whose possibilities were ever present and harrowing my thoughts. Ten minutes before the coach arrived I wrung my hands and cried to the already weeping Mrs. Pelly:

"I know for certain that that horrid little man will fail me. He's got my money, and therefore all he

does desire. Oh, why did I give it him! Surely I might have known that he'd undo me!"

"Oh, no, I'm sure he won't!" says poor Emblem, breaking out in sobs. "I am sure he is a good man, and an honest. I would trust that man under any circumstances."

"Do you really think so?" cries I, clinging to the weakest straw.

"Yes," wept Emblem, more bitterly than ever, "I am sure Mr. Snark is a good and honest man."

Very soon the coach was at the door. Even this was a relief, for activity took some of the tension from our minds, and now the very imminence of the thing numbed their aches in some degree. I paid not the slightest heed to the way we went, or to the appearance of the streets, my senses all being deadened with their gloominess. Presently the jolting of the coach grew less, the horses reduced their pace, and the low murmur of the mob uprose. My voice shook pitifully when I said to Emblem, who would insist on accompanying me through everything:

"Are we in good time?"

"The cart is not due for nearly an hour yet," she answered.

To avoid the press, the coachman turned his horses into an unfrequented bye-street, and shortly afterwards brought them to a stand before a door in a row of dismal-looking houses. I sprang out lightly and unconcernedly, not without a signal effort, though; but above all things I was resolved not to give one sign of weakness to the world. It annoyed and somewhat disconcerted me to find that a small company of the

vulgar curious was collected about the coach, and more particularly when a fat and dirty-aproned housewife nudged a neighbour and exclaimed, with outstretched finger pointed straight at me: "That's her! That's her ladyship! 'aven't she got a face!"

As I was passing through the throng, a groom came up the street riding a sorrel mare. This was cheering in a measure, as it told me that thus far all arrangements were being religiously observed. But immediately the door was opened and then closed upon my entrance, and I found myself standing with Emblem excluded from the crowd in the dark kitchen of the house, I was suddenly aroused by a highly propitious circumstance. I was surprised to find at my side a little, very villainous-looking person dressed in the decent plain suit of an attorney, with a remarkable clean cravat and a neat tie wig that somewhat softened his extremely wicked countenance. But at his first word, that came from behind his hand in a wheezing whisper, I felt my blood move quicker, for to my joy I identified him as the celebrated Mr. Snark.

"How d'ye do, Miss! Pretty bobbish are ye?" he said in my ear. "Pretty spry upon the perch, eh? And I say, Miss, there's a wonderful sweet set of parsons, clergymen, and etcetera assembled in the front. A wonderful sweet set, Miss, wiv plenty o' good old ale and stingo in 'em; and on'y a hundred sojers on duty too. And who do you think's the Chapling, Miss? Why, the Reverend Willum Vickerstaff, the drunkenest old crimp wot ever sat in church. By thunder, Miczy, I fair envies you, I does, a sittin' at that window alookin' at the musick. I wouldn't give fourpence for them

redcoats. For I tell you, Missy, old Snark's a-goin' to do the thing in style, not a-goin' to spare a farden of expense, for when Snark does a thing he does it gaudy. By gum! won't them blessed traps at Bow Street just a' bat their eyes?"

At that moment I think I could have taken this outrageous little villain in my arms and incontinently hugged him. Instead, however, I fervently apostrophised him.

"God requite you, Mr. Snark," I cried, "for a good man and a true."

I pressed him to accept a purse of fifty guineas over and above the sum agreed upon.

"No, not a blessed head," he replied. "Snark's not a dirty screw, but a man o' fambly and a proper hartiss at his work. Takes a fair pride in it, he does, which is the reason why his reppitation seizes all Bow Street by the belly."

Upon this the worthy creature conducted me up the gloomy stairs to the window that commanded the execution ground. The sight that then confronted me I have often met again in dreams. The immediate look of it was enough to produce a cold sweat on my brow. The whole of England seemed already collected in that square. Tier upon tier, multitude on multitude, were swaying, elbowing, and jostling below, marvellously cheerful, but awfully intent. The tall, gaunt scaffold raised upon a platform in their midst, with a treble file of bright-armed and red-coated soldiers standing round it, was a very lodestone that drew every face thereto. The blood went slow within me as I gazed at this fretful

mass, whose heavy buzz of talk was at intervals succeeded by the brisk roaring of a pot-house song. The cold, gray winter morning appeared a proper background for this sordid scene, I thought, whilst the high, dun-coloured houses that reared themselves on every side, quick with their throngs of eager witnesses, seemed quite in harmony with the horrid gloom of the tragedy so soon to be enacted.

I was still in excellent good time. The condemned man was not due for a full half-hour yet. My invited guests were beginning to arrive, however, but everything had been ordered excellently well. The room was large enough to accommodate two windows, and these had been removed, and several rows of chairs had been placed behind their apertures, and so skilfully arranged that twenty persons could be gratified with a view.

The first of my kind friends to appear was a certain Mrs. Jennings, an obese and comfortable person, with a perfect confidence in, and admiration for, herself. This was not assumption either, seeing that she had snared four different coronets for a corresponding number of her female progeny. She brought her husband too; a quite tame creature, whom she led about to routs and parties and called "Dear Harry" in a simpering, caressing manner. "Dear Harry's" conversation was limited to "'Pon my soul!" and it was his pleasure to retire to a corner early and sit bolt upright on the extreme edge of his chair. And I think I found him to be the most fascinating being that I ever met, for I would gaze at him a desperate length of time, since it really seemed a miracle how

such a large amount of man could be possibly supported by such a small amount of chair. This pair were pretty soon augmented by a parcel of the high grandees. The incomparable Countess of Pushington minced in, a perfect phenomenon of youth, considering that she brought the youngest daughter of her second marriage with her, my Lady Crabstock Parker, who, to do her justice, looked really very little older than her adorable mamma. Mrs. Laura Wiggling came, of course; a very whimsical, amusing mixture of Christianity and criticism. She was most desirous to drop a prayer-book, which she had brought for the purpose, from the window into the cart as it passed by. She thought it might shed a little light on the dark way that the dear criminal had to tread. The Duchess of Rabies was truly condescending and most affable. The men who accompanied this galaxy of talent, beauty, and good nature, betrayed almost immediately, I regret to say, the exceeding masculinity of their minds. They began at once to lay and to take bets regarding the number of kicks the sufferer would make at space before he perished.

However, the mere presence of these enemies proved a tonic to my nerves. Having to play a part before those I despised, and to combat their hostility, I was thereby enabled to forget in some degree the peculiar horror of my situation. Before ten o'clock the full number of guests were present, seventeen in all, and I could feel instinctively the zest with which they noted and minutely analysed my most trivial actions. They used a

certain tone of sympathetic consideration towards me, which in itself was irony, and carefully refrained from saying a harsh or unkind thing of the rebel, as if to show that they were fully acquainted with my exceeding tenderness towards him, and that their native delicacy would not permit them to distress it. They agreed with the sweetest unanimity that he must be a charming person. Yet it should be recorded to my eternal praise, I think, and as an instance of the mind's strength conquering the weakness of the heart, that I received all these covert taunts without one betrayal of my secret rage. I laughed and jested with the men, and caressed all these dear women with my prettiest phrases. I do not think there was a solitary person present who could have divined that my very heart was bursting with a suppressed agony of terror. Snark might be as faithful as the day, all things might be ordered perfectly, and there be no ground for fear whatever; but I could not divest my mind of the knowledge that tens of thousands were assembled roaring and surging down below, and packed as thick as summer flies in a rotten carcase. I could not expel the grim image of the scaffold from my eyes, the densely populated windows; the strained, awaiting eagerness of the mob; nor could I fail to hear all the sounds of portent; the deliberate slow tolling of the passing bell of an adjacent church, the striking of the hour of ten, and directly afterwards the new commotion that went up, as the tidings travelled in a murmur from mouth to mouth the whole length of the multitude "It's coming!"

"Do they mean the cart, my dear?" one dear creature inquired innocently of me.

"Yes," says I with amination, "my dear Duchess, I really believe they do. We are coming to the fun now, are we not! 'Twill be highly entertaining presently."

The Duchess's eyes burned in her head to discover a flaw in the utter nonchalance of my demeanour, but grievous was her disappointment. My bold look fairly challenged her to find one, and I think I can safely say that not the Duchess alone, but this whole assembly of dear friends was chagrined that I had not the consideration to regale it with my pain. The gruesome vehicle was already close at hand. It was coming at a foot pace down the Uxbridge Road, and the throng parted readily before it to let it pass. Conversation ceased now, and we took our seats at the windows. And I think it was well for me that this new diversion held the attention of my friends, for I doubt whether, with my lover before my eyes, I could have kept up the bitter farce. Certainly, no sooner did I behold the slow-coming vehicle, with its pale young occupant, and the procession of prison officers, soldiers, the chaplain, and the executioner, than I had to stifle an involuntary cry that sprang into my throat, and for support was compelled to cling an instant to the window-sill in front.

Even as the cart appeared, a tentative beam of the wintry sun struggled into the cold grey morning. Its effect was very weird and strange upon that great company of expectant, upturned faces, gazing with a kind of rapt horror at the poor young creature who was to die.

The rebel and his escort were now quite near, and I could see the full disposition of his features very plain. I looked down upon him from my vantage involuntarily almost, and raked his face again and again with my eyes to discover one flaw in the perfect demeanour of my hero. And somehow as I looked I felt the vain pride rise in my heart, for a king could not have gone forth to his doom with more propriety. There was no hint of bravado in his bearing, but his head was carried nobly, without undue defiance and without undue humility; his mouth was resolute, and his eyes alert and clear. In all my life I never saw a man look so firm, so spirited, so proud.

As he approached more nearly I discerned a look of expectation and enquiry on his face, and his eyes scanned the houses and the mob searchingly and quickly as though they fervently desired the sight of someone whom they could not see. Indeed, to me these questioning glances grew painfully apparent, until I remembered suddenly the person who had inspired them, whereon a strange mad happiness trembled in my blood. 'Twas then I forgot the world entirely—yea, even its uncharity, my sneering and rejoicing enemies, and the grievous comedy that I was condemned to play. I became oblivious to everything but the pitiless fact that the one man in the world was proceeding with noble simplicity and patience to his doom, and that I was the one of all those thousands there assembled, that he craved to see.

In an instant I jumped up and leant as far out of the window as I could, waving my handkerchief most

wildly several times, and then cried out at the very topmost of my voice :

"I am here, child ! Here I am ! God be with you, lad ! God bless you !"

Such a singular stillness had taken the curious multitude at the apparition of the cart that my tones rang out clearly as a bell, and by the startled movement of a thousand heads, were heard, indeed, by all in the vicinity. And, amongst others, the poor rebel heard, and swiftly looking up he saw my outstretched form and my handkerchief still fluttering. Thereupon the blood painted his white cheeks most eloquent in crimson ; his face spread out in fine animated sparkles, and he plucked off his hat and waved it in reply. Almost immediately thereafter the cart was stopped and placed carefully into its position under the noose that dangled from the beam ; the soldiers closed up, promptly cleared a convenient space, and stood in a ring with bayonets drawn, whilst the Sheriff, the Chaplain, the Governor of Newgate, and various high dignitaries took up their stations on the scaffold. 'Twas astonishing the brisk precision with which everything was done. Before I could grasp the idea that the condemned was actually at the point of death, the executioner was standing with one foot on the scaffold and another in the cart, tying the criminal's hands behind him. At the same moment the Chaplain produced a greasy, black-backed tome, and began to mumble indistinctly the service for the dead. The whole matter was so fascinating that I could not pluck my eyes from the scene, and though I had a certain dim idea that some strange, vague

power was about to intervene, for my life I could not have told just then what it was to be; nay, and should not have greatly felt the loss of it until the bloody drama had been played.

All this time the mob below had been striving towards the scaffold, only to be forced back by the vigorous measures of the guard of soldiers. This, however, was no more than the natural eagerness of a crowd to procure a fuller view, and was perfectly appropriate and good-humoured on the side of both. But as soon as the executioner had confined his victim's wrists, and was engaged in opening his shirt that he might adjust the rope around his throat, one portion of the mob quite adjacent to the scaffold grew suddenly obstreperous; sticks went up, and cries arose. Thereupon the Sheriff and the officials of the prison situate upon the platform began to behave in a most excited fashion, dancing and throwing their arms about and crying orders to the guard, whilst for the nonce the executioner suspended his employ. In an instant the mob began to violently surge, oaths were screamed, and staves began to crack and to descend. Down went a redcoat, and then another; thereupon the fight grew general all about the cart, but it soon became apparent that not only were the troops outnumbered, but that they were so confined and encumbered by the press that their heavy weapons could assist them little, as they could not force them into a position to be of service. And in very conscience the riot had started with rare decision and effect. A solid phalanx of lusty, well-primed rogues had been concen-

trated all on one point by their clever general, and the promptitude with which they did their business really was surprising. Crack! crack! smacked the cudgels, loud howled the mob, and down went the soldiers of the King. Inside a minute the ring was completely broken up, and the rioters had assumed entire control of the scaffold and the cart, whilst the guard was so hopelessly disordered that their coats of red appeared in twenty isolated places amongst a throng, which, to do it justice, certainly did its best to restrict them in every way it could. Its sympathies, as usual, were by no means on the side of the law. Pretty soon half a dozen rioters were mishandling the cart and freeing its pinioned occupant. One cut the cords that bound him, a second pressed a stave into his liberated fist, a third engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with the executioner; a fourth struck at the Sheriff, missed him, and hit the inoffensive chaplain, and "tapped the claret" of the reverend gentleman, whose bottle-nose must have been really very difficult to avoid. 'Twas quite exhilarating to witness the glorious conduct of it all. Everything seemed to be performed like clock-work, and with incredible brutality and zest. Had I been unable to realise the exceeding brilliancy of the tactics that were adopted throughout the whole affair, certain observations of the presiding genius must have made me do so. For to round and finish the matter in a consummate way, no sooner had the fight begun than I became conscious that Mr. Snark had cleft through the throng of fashionables about me, and was standing at my side, emitting a stream of counsel, criticism, and encouragement.

"Got 'em on a hook!" he cried. "That's it, Parker, hit. Give 'em pepper. Hit that fat hulk of a Sheriff over the bleeding hat. Very nice indeed."

Mr. Snark rubbed his hands with satisfaction. Meantime down below, the inevitable consequence had followed the flowing blood and the free exchange of blows. The guard had entirely lost control of the crowd collected about the scaffold, which immediately seized its opportunity of getting even with the law. Not only did it offer the rebel and his escort every facility to escape, but was at equal pains to impede the soldiers, the Sheriff, and the officials of the gaol in their effort to arrest the condemned man's flight. And this they succeeded very well in doing. A bodyguard of hard-hitting rogues formed about the rescued rebel and hurried him at a double through the friendly mob, that gave way right gallantly before them.

It made me almost wild with joy to behold my young lover and his company of sturdy dogs cleave through the kind-intentioned press till they came in safety to the door of the very house in which I was. At the moment that he approached the threshold, I wheeled about, and almost overturned a lord as I ran from the chamber and darted down the stairs. His liberators, faithful to the implicit instructions of Mr. Snark, had already got him in the house.

There was a great press of people on his heels pouring in through the open door as I came down the stairs. However, I was able to breast through the throng, and fervently clasp my intrepid lover's hand.

"Quick! quick!" I whispered. "Do not dally. Get through to the back. A horse awaits you. Do

not draw rein till you are at the "White Hart," Dover. Here's a purse to meet your needs; and here is Mr. Snark. Heed every word of his instructions. Good-bye lad, and God go with you!"

Straightway Mr. Snark stepped forth, and led his charge to where the horse awaited him, whilst as he did so, he threw a cloak about his shoulders, and poured a volume of instructions into his receptive ear. And with such alacrity was the full affair accomplished, that the soldiers were yet wrestling with the mob, and I had barely time to reascend the stairs, and withdraw with divers of my friends to an adjacent chamber which commanded a view of Piper's Alley instead of Tyburn Tree, ere the rebel was on his horse, and fleeing through London for his life. It seemed that there was also a second horse in readiness, and he who mounted it was no less a person than the celebrated Mr. Snark. 'Twas he that accompanied my dearest Anthony.

"There he goes!" cries I, to my dear friend Hilda Flummery as the sorrel's hoofs rang out upon the stones. "There goes my future husband! He'll be in France before to-morrow."

"Your future what, dear Bab?" cries she.

"My future husband, dear," says I, demurely.

All who heard shook their heads, of course, or smiled broadly at the jest that they chose to call it. But they were not aware that I had made my mind up on this point, and I have writ a little epilogue to this strange memoir of my wooing to prove to those who may not know, how formidable I do become when I make my mind up on any point soever.

EPILOGUE.

IF one only have beauty, wealth, station, and understanding, and withal a general air of triumph, all things are possible. Kings are really very reasonable persons, and Governments, well—Governments have been known to be amenable if handled with discretion. I am spurred to these wise remarks by the singular nature of my case, for on July 2nd, 1747, I was wedded to my Anthony at the Church of St. Sepulchre, in the City of London. No fewer than five members of the Privy Council embellished that ceremony with their presence, one of whom was there to represent his Most Gracious Majesty the King. Now at that time the family swore upon their souls that they would not forgive me for it; but it is here my privilege to place on record that they have done so very handsomely, for, under my tuition, I make bold to say that my dearest Anthony has become the brightest ornament that our house has known. His excellent good wit, and the brightness of his natural parts, have won for him a place in the history of this realm, as from the first I had predicted. But doubtless he is better known to you and to the world as the celebrated Duke of B——, a man of conspicuous talents and princely virtues; perfect father, devoted husband, wise councillor, and the faithful servant of a country that once condemned him to be hanged.